

HUCKLEBERRIES

GATHERED FROM NEW ENGLAND
HILLS

BY

ROSE TERRY COOKE



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I OFFER THIS SHEAF OF STORIES TO
MY DEAREST FRIEND
ANNIE TRUMBULL SLOSSON
AS A SLIGHT EXPRESSION OF MY DEEP LOVE
AND GRATITUDE

" There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother "

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PREFACE.

I HAVE called this latest collection of New England stories by the name of a wild berry that has always seemed to me typical of the New England character.

Hardy, sweet yet spicy, defying storms of heat or cold with calm persistence, clinging to a poor soil, barren pastures, gray and rocky hillsides, yet drawing fruitful issues from scanty sources, it is most fitly celebrated by our own great poet : —

“There ’s a berry blue and gold, —
Autumn-ripe, its juices hold
Sparta’s stoutness, Bethlehem’s heart,
Asia’s rancor, Athens’ art,
Slow-sure Britain’s secular might
And the German’s inward sight.”

“What can the man say that cometh after the King ? ”

R. T. C.



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HUCKLEBERRIES.

GRIT.

“LOOK a-here, Phœbe, I won’t hev no such goin’s-on here. That feller’s got to make tracks. I don’t want none o’ Jake Potter’s folks round, ’nd you may as well lay your account with it, ’nd fix accordin’.”

Phœbe Fyler set her teeth together, and looked her father in the face with her steady gray eyes; but she said nothing, and the old man scrambled up into his rickety wagon and drove off.

“Fyler grit” was a proverb in Pasco, and old Reuben did credit to the family reputation. But his share of “grit” was not simply endurance, perseverance, dogged persistence, and courage, but a most unlimited obstinacy and full faith in his own wisdom. Phœbe was his own child, and when things came to an open struggle between them, it was hard to tell which would conquer.

There had been a long quarrel between the Fylers and Potters — such a quarrel as can only be found in little country villages, where people are thrown so near together and have so little to divert

their minds that they become as belligerent as a company of passengers on a sailing vessel — fire easily and smoulder long. But Phœbe Fyler was a remarkably pretty girl, with great, clear gray eyes, a cheek like the wild rose, abundance of soft brown hair, and a sweet firm mouth and square cleft chin that told their own story of Fyler blood; and Tom Potter was a smart, energetic, fiery young fellow, ready to fight for his rights and then to shake hands with his enemy, whichever beat. There was no law to prevent his falling in love with Phœbe because their fathers had hated each other; indeed, that was rather an inducement. His honest, generous heart looked on the family feud with pity and regret. He would like to cancel it, especially if marrying Phœbe would do it.

And why should she hate him? Her father was an old tyrant in his family; and the feeble, pale mother, who had always trembled at his step since the girl could remember, had never taught her to love her father, because she did not love him herself. Obedience, indeed, was ground into Phœbe. It was obey or suffer in that family, and the rod hanging over the shelf was not in vain. But when she grew up, and left the childish instinct or habit behind her, and the Fyler grit developed, she had the sense to avoid an open conflict whenever she could, for her mother's sake.

This, however, was a matter of no small importance to Phœbe. She had met Tom Potter time after time at sewing societies, sleigh rides, huckle-

berryings, and other rustic amusements; they sat together in the singers' seat, they went to rehearsal; but Tom had never come home with her until lately, and then always parted at the doorsill. Now he had taken the decisive step; he had come Sunday evening to call, and every Pasco girl knew what that meant. It was a declaration. But while Phœbe's heart beat at his clear whistle outside, and stood still at his knock, she saw with dismay her father rise to open the door.

"Good-evening, Mr. Fyler."

"How de do? how de do?" was the sufficiently cordial reply; for the old man was half blind, and by the flicker of his tallow candle could noway discern who his visitor might be.

"I don't really make out who ye be," he went on, peering into the darkness.

"My name 's Potter. Is Phœbe to home?"

"Jake Potter's son?"

"Yes, I be. Is Phœbe to home?"

An ominous flash from Tom's black eyes accentuated the question this time, but old Reuben was too blind to see it. He drew back the candle, and said, in a surly but decisive tone, —

"'T ain't no matter to you ef she is or ef she ain't," and calmly shut the door in his face.

For a moment Tom Potter was furious. Decency forbade that he should take the door off its rackety hinges, like Samson at the gates of Gaza, but he felt a strong impulse to do so, and then an equally strong one to laugh, for the affair had its

humorous side. The result was that neither humor nor anger prevailed ; but as he strode away, a fixed purpose to woo and marry Phœbe, "whether or no," took possession of him.

"I'll see ef Potter faculty can't match Fyler grit," he muttered to himself ; and not without reason, for the Potters had that trait which conquers the world far more surely and subtly than grit, — "faculty," *i. e.*, a clear head and a quick wit, and capacity of adaptation that wrests from circumstance its stringent sceptre, and is the talisman of what the world calls "luck."

In the mean time Phœbe, by the kitchen fire, sat burning with rage. Her father came back chuckling.

"I've sent that spark up chimney pretty everlasting quick."

Phœbe's red lips parted for a rude answer, but her mother signaled to her from beyond the fireplace, and the sad pale face had its usual effect on her. She knew that sore heart would ache beyond any sleep if she and her father came to words ; so she took up her candle to go to bed, but she did not escape.

"You've no need to be a-muggin' about that feller, Phœbe," cackled the old man after her. "He won't never darken my doors, nor your'n nuther ; so ye jest stop a-hankerin' arter him, right off slap. The idee ! a Potter a-comin' here arter you !"

Phœbe's eyes blazed. She stopped on the lower stair, and spoke sharply, —

"Mebbe you'll find there's more things can go out o' the chimney than sparks," and then hurried up, banging the door behind her in very womanish fashion, and burst into tears as soon as she reached her room.

It was Tuesday morning when old Fyler drove from his door, hurling the words at the beginning of our story at Phœbe, on the doorstep.

He had found out that Tom Potter had gone to Hartford the day before for a week's stay, and took the chance to drive sixteen miles down the river on some business, sure that in his day's absence Tom could not get back to Pasco, and Phœbe would be safe.

But man proposes in vain sometimes. Mr. Fyler did his errand at Taunton, ate his dinner at the dirty little tavern, and set out for home. As he was jogging quietly along, laying plans for the easy discomfiture of Tom and Phœbe, a loud roll of wheels roused him, a muffled roar like a heavy pulse beat, a shriek as of ten thousand hysterical females, and right in the face and eyes of old Jerry appeared a locomotive under full headway, coming round a curve of the track, which the old man had either forgotten, or not known, ran beside the highway for nearly half a mile. Jerry was old and sober and steady, but what man even could bear the sudden and unforeseen charge of a railway engine bearing down upon him face to face? The horse started, reared, jumped aside, and took to his heels for dear life; the wagon tilted up on a

convenient stone, and threw the driver violently out; but in all the shock and terror the "Fyler grit" never failed. With horny hands he grasped the reins so powerfully that the horse could drag him but a few steps before he was stopped by the weight on the bit, and then, as Reuben tried to gather himself out of the dust and consider the situation, he found that one leg hung helpless from the knee, his cheek and forehead were well grazed, and his teeth — precious possession, over whose cost he had groaned and perspired as a necessary but dreadful expense — had disappeared entirely. This was the worst blow. Half blind, with a terrified horse and a broken leg, totally alone and seventy-seven years old, who else would have stopped to consider their false teeth? But he dragged himself over the ground, holding the reins with one hand, groping and fumbling in the dust, till fortunately the missing set was found, uninjured by wheel or stone, but considerably mixed up with kindred clay.

"Whoa, I tell ye! whoa!" shouted the old man to Jerry, who, with wild eyes and erect ears, stood quivering and eager to be off.

"Darn ye, stan' still!" and jerking the reins by way of comment, he crept and hitched himself toward the wagon. Jerry looked round, and seemed to understand the situation. He set down the pawing forefoot, lowered the pointed ears, and, though he trembled still, stood as a rock might, till, with pain and struggle, his master raised him-

self on one foot against the wheel, and, setting his lips tight, contrived to get into the wagon, and on to the seat. "Git up!" he said, and Jerry started with a spring that brought a dark flush of pain to the old man's cheek. But he did not stop nor stay for pain. "Git up, I tell ye! We've got to git as fur as Baxter, anyhow. Go 'long, Jerry." And on he drove, though the broken leg, beginning to swell and press on the stiff boot-leg, gave him exquisite pain. But a mile or two passed before he met any one, for it was just noon, and all the countryfolk were at their dinner. At last a man appeared in the distance, and Reuben drew up by the roadside, and shouted to him to stop. It proved to be an Irishman, on his way to a farm just below.

"Say, have ye got a jackknife?" was Reuben's salutation.

"Yis, surr, I have that; and a fuss-rate knoife as iver ye see. What's wantin'?"

"Will yer ole hoss stan' a spell?"

"Sure he'll stand till the day afther niver, av I'd let him. It's standin' he takes to far more than goin'."

"Then you git out, will ye, 'nd fetch yer knife over here 'nd cut my boot-leg down."

"What 'n the wurld are ye afther havin' yer boot cut for?" queried the Irishman, clambering down to the ground.

"Well, I got spilt out a piece back. Hoss got skeert by one o' them pesky ingines, 'nd I expect

I broke my leg. It's kinder useless, 'nd it's kep' a-swellin' ever sence, so 's't it hurts like blazes, I tell ye."

"The divil an' all — broke yer leg, man alive? An' how did ye get back to the waggin?"

"Oh, I wriggled in somehow. Come, be quick! I want to git to Baxter right off."

"Why, is it mad ye are? Turn about, man. There's Kinney's farm just beyant a bit. Come in there. I'll fetch the docthor for yez."

"No, I won't stop. I must git to the tavern to Baxter fust; then I'll go home, if I can fix it."

"The Lord help ye, thin, ye poor old crathur!"

"You help me fust, and don't jaw no more."

And so snapped at, the astounded Irishman proceeded to cut the boot off — a slow and painful process, but of some relief when over; and Jerry soon heard the word of command to start forward. Three more hard uphill miles brought them to the tavern, just at the entrance of Baxter, and Jerry stopped at the backdoor.

"Hullo!" shouted the old man; and the man who kept the house rose from his armchair with a yawn and sauntered leisurely to the piazza. But his steps quickened as soon as he found out what was the matter, and with neighborly aid Mr. Fyler was soon carried upstairs and laid on a bed, and the doctor sent for. "Say, don't ye give Jerry no oats, now I tell ye. I won't pay for 'em. He's used to hay, 'nd he'll get a mess o' meal to-night arter we get home."

"Why, you can't get home to-night!" exclaimed the landlord.

"Can't. I? I will, anyhow, ye'd better believe. I've got to be there whether or no. Where's that darned doctor? Brush the dirt off'n my coat, will ye? 'nd here, jest rence off them teeth," handing them out of his pocket. "I lost 'em out, 'nd hed to scrape round in the dirt quite a spell afore I found 'em."

"Well, I swan to man!" ejaculated the landlord. "Do you mean to say you hunted round after them 'ere things after you'd got a broke leg?"

"Sure's you live, sir. I hitched around just like a youngster a-learnin' to creep, 'nd drawed my leg along back side o' me; I'm kinder blind, ye see, or I should ha' found 'em quicker."

"By George! ef you hain't got the most grit!" And the landlord went off to tell his tale in the office.

"Take him up a drink o' rum, Joe," was the comment of a hearer. "I know him. He polishes his nose four times a week, you bet; rum's kinder nateral to him. His dad kep' a corner grocery. A drink 'll do him good. I 'll stan' treat, fur he's all-fired close. He'd faint away afore he'd buy a drink, fur he 'stills his own cider-brandy. But flesh an' blood can't allers go it on grit, ef 't is Fyler grit, 'nd he'll feel considerable mean afore the doctor gets here. Fetch him up a good stiff sling, 'nd chalk it down to me."

A kindly and timely tonic the sling seemed to be, and the old fellow took it with great ease.

"Taste kinder nateral?" inquired the interested landlord, with suspended spoon.

"It's reel refrashin'," was the long-delayed answer, as the empty tumbler went back to join the unoccupied spoon. "Now fetch on yer doctor." And without a groan or a word the old man bore the examination, which revealed the fact that both bones of the leg were fractured; or, as the landlord expressed it to a gaping and expectant crowd outside, "His leg's broke short off in two places." Without any more ado Reuben bore the setting and splinting of the crushed limb, and accepted meekly another dose of the "refrashin'" fluid from the bar-room. "Now, doctor, I want to be a-travelin' right off."

"Traveling! where to?" demanded the doctor, glaring at him over his spectacles.

"Where to! why, back to our folks's, to Pasco."

"You travel to the land of Nod, man. Go to sleep; you won't see Pasco to-day nor to-morrow."

"I'm a-goin', anyhow. I tell ye I've got ter. Important bizness. I would n't be kep' here for a thousand dollars."

The doctor saw a hot flush rise to his face, and an ominous glitter invade the dull eye. He knew his man, and he knew what determined opposition and helplessness might do for him. At seventy-

seven, a broken leg is no trifle ; but if fever sets in, matters become complicated.

“ Well,” he said, by way of humoring the refractory patient, “ if you ’re bound to go, you must go to-night ; to-morrow ’ll be harder for you to move.” And with a friendly nod he left the room, and the landlord followed him.

“ Ye don’t expect he ’s a-goin’ to go, do ye, doctor ? ”

“ Lord, man ! he might as well stand on his head ! Still, you don’t know old Reub Fyler, perhaps. He ’s as clear grit as a grindstone, and if he is bound to go, he ’ll go ; heaven nor earth won’t stop him, nor men neither.” And the doctor stepped into his sulky and drove off.

An hour afterward Reuben Fyler insisted on being sent home. A neighbor from Pasco, who had come down after grain with a long wagon, heard of the accident, and happened in.

“ I ’m bound to git home, John Barnes,” said the old man. “ I’ve got ter ; I’ve got bizness. Well, I might as well tell ye, that darned Potter feller ’s a-snakin’ ’nd a-sneakin’ round arter Phœbe, ’nd ef I ’m laid up here, he ’ll be hangin’ round there as sure as guns. Fust I know they ’ll up ’nd git merried. I ’ll see him hanged fust ! I ’m goin’ hum to-night. I can keep her under my thumb ef I ’m there ; but ye know how ’tis : when the cat ’s away ”—

“ H’m ! ” said John Barnes — a man slow of speech, but perceptive. “ Well, ef you ’re bound

to go, you can have my waggin, 'nd I'll drive your'n up."

"But change hosses; I can't drive no hoss but Jerry."

"You drive!" exclaimed John, in unfeigned astonishment.

"My arms ain't broke, I tell ye, 'nd I ain't a-goin' to pay nobody for what I can do myself, you can jest swear to that."

And John Barnes retreated to hold council with the bar-room loungers. But remonstrance was in vain. About five o'clock the long wagon was brought up, the seat shoved quite back to the end, and an extempore bed made of flour bags, hay, and old buffalo-ropes on the floor of the rickety vehicle; the old man was carried carefully down, packed in as well as the case allowed, his splinted and bandaged leg tied to the side to keep it steady, his head propped up with his overcoat rolled into a bundle, and an old carriage carpet thrown over him and tucked in. Then another "refrashin'" fluid was administered, and the reins being put into his hands, with a sharp chirrup to old Jerry, he started off at a quick trot, and before John Barnes could get into his wagon and follow, Fyler was round the corner, out of sight, speeded by the cheers and laughter of the spectators, and eulogized by the landlord, as he bit off the end of a fresh cigar, as "the darnedest piece of Fyler grit or any other grit I ever see!"

In the mean time Phœbe at home went about

her daily work in a kind of sullen peace : peaceful, because her father was out of the way for one day at least ; sullen, because she foresaw no end of trouble coming to her, but never for one moment had an idea of giving up Tom Potter, or of any way to achieve her freedom except by enduring obstinacy. Many another girl, quick-witted or well read in novels, would have enjoyed the situation with a certain zest, and already invented plenty of stratagems ; but Phœbe had not been educated in modern style, and tact or cunning was not native to her ; she could endure or resist to the death, but she could not elude or beguile, and her father knew it. Her mother was helpless to aid her ; but, with the courage mothers have, she set herself out of the question, and having thought deeply all the morning, over the knitting-work, which was all she could do now, she surprised Phœbe in the midst of her potato-paring by suddenly saying : —

“Phœbe, I see what you ’re a-thinkin’ of, and I want to say my say now, afore anybody comes in. I ’ve heerd enough o’ Tom Potter to know he ’s a reel likely young feller ; he ’s stiddy, ’nd he ’s a professor besides, ’nd he ’s got a good trade ; there ain’t no reason on airth why you should n’t keep company with him, ef you like him. It ’s clear senseless to hev your life spoiled because your folks ’nd his folks querreled, away back, about a water right.”

Phœbe dropped the potatoes, and gave her mother a speechless hug, that brought the tears into those pale blue eyes.

“Softly, dear! I don’t mean to set ye ag’in your pa, nowadays; but I don’t think man nor woman hes a right to say their gal sha’n’t marry a man that ain’t bad nor shiftless, jest ’cause they don’t fancy him; ’nd I don’t want to leave ye here when I go, to live my life over agin.”

“Oh, mother,” exclaimed Phœbe, almost dropping the pan again, “I think it would be awful mean of me to leave you here alone!”

“’T would n’t be no worse, Phœbe. I should miss ye, no doubt on’t; I should miss ye consider’ble, but then I should n’t worry over your hard times here as I do, some, all the time.”

Poor saint! she fought her battle there by the fireside, and nobody saw it but the “cloud of witnesses,” who had hung over many a martyrdom before that was not illustrated by fire or sword.

Phœbe choked a little, and her clear eyes softened; she was only a girl, and she did not fully understand what her mother had suffered and renounced for her, but she loved her with all her warm heart.

“I can’t help ye none, Phœbe,” Mrs. Fyler went on, with a patient smile, “but I can comfort ye, mebbe, and, as fur as my consent goes, you hev it, ef you want to marry Tom; but oh! Phœbe, be sure, sure as death, you *do* want to: don’t marry him to get away from home. I’d ruther see ye drowned in Long Pond.”

Phœbe’s cheek colored deeply and her bright eyes fell, for her mother’s homely words were solemn in their meaning and tone.

"I *am* sure, mother," she said softly, and went away to fetch more wood for the fire; and neither of the women spoke again of the matter, but Phœbe's brow cleared of its trouble, and her mother lay back in her chair and prayed in her heart. Poor woman! she had mighty need of such a refuge.

So night came on, and after long delay they ate their supper, presuming that the head of the house was delayed by business, little thinking how he, strapped into John Barnes's wagon, was pursuing his homeward road in the gathering darkness and solitude; for though John caught up with him soon, after a mile or two some empty sacks fell out of the Barnes wagon, and no sooner did John miss them than he coolly turned back and left old Reuben to find his way alone. But the old man did not care; he had courage for anything; so he drove along as cheerily as ever, though his dim sight was darkened further by the darkening air, the overhanging trees, and the limit set to his vision by the horse's head, which from his position was all he could see before him.

About nine o'clock a benighted traveler driving toward Baxter from Pasco way, with his wife, discerned dimly an approaching horse and wagon, apparently without a driver. He reined his own horse and covered buggy into the ditch, to give room, but the road was narrow, and the other horse kept in the middle.

"Turn out! turn out!" shouted the anxious

man. "Are you asleep or drunk? Turn out, I tell you!"

But old Fyler heard the echo only of the strenuous voice, and turned out the wrong way, setting his own wheels right into the wheels of the stranger's buggy.

"You drunken idiot! back, back, I say! you've run right into me" — not without objurgations of a slightly profane character to emphasize his remark. "Back, I say! The devil! can't you hear?"

By this time both horses were excited; the horse in the ditch began to plunge, the other one to rear and back, till, what between the pull of his master on the reins and his own terror, Jerry backed his load down the steep bank at the roadside, and but for a tree that caught the wheel, horse, driver, and wagon would have gone headlong into a situation of fatal reverses, where even Fyler grit could not avail.

"Murder!" cried the old man. "I've broke my leg, 'nd I'm pitchin' over th' edge! Lordy massy! stop the cretur! Who be ye? Ketch his head, can't ye? Thunderation! I'm a-tippin', sure's ye live!"

"Let your horse alone, you old fool!" shouted the exasperated traveler, who was trying vainly to tie his own to some saplings by the roadside, while his wife scrambled out as best she might over the floundering wheels. But by the time the man succeeded, Fyler's horse had been so demon-

strative that the wagon wheels were twisted and locked together, the wagon body tilted up to a dangerous degree, and the old man rolled down to the other side and half out, where he hung helpless, tied by the knee, sick with the pain of his wrenched leg, and unable to stir; but still he yelled for help.

"Can you hold this plaguy horse's head, Anne?" said the traveler. "I never can right the wheels while he plunges and rears like that."

"I'll try," was the quiet response; and being a woman of courage and weight, she hung on to the bridle, though Jerry made frantic efforts to lift her off the ground and stand on his hind-legs, till the wagon was righted, the groaning old man replaced, his story told, and he ready once more to shake the reins, which still were grasped in his hard hands.

"But you ain't going on alone in this dark?" asked the astonished traveler.

"Yes, I be, yes, I be — sartain. I shall git on well enough ef I don't meet nobody, 'nd I guess I sha'n't."

"But you met us."

"Well, it's a-growin' later 'nd later; there won't be many folks out to-night; they ginerly knows enough to stay to hum arter dark out our way." With which Parthian remark he chirruped to Jerry and trotted away, without a word of thanks or acknowledgment, aching and groaning, and muttering to himself, "Darned fool! what'd

he want to be a-kitin' round in a narrer road this time o' night? Fixed me out, I guess; but I'll get hum, anyhow. Git up, Jerry!"

And Jerry got up to such a purpose that about twelve o'clock that night a loud shouting at the front door roused Phœbe and her mother, and they were forced to call in a couple of men from the next neighbor's, at least a quarter of a mile away, to get the old man into the house, undressed, and put to bed.

As might have been expected, fever set in; but he fought that with "Fyler grit." And though fever is a force of itself, there is a certain willful vitality and strength of will in some people that exert wonderful influence over physical maladies; and after a few days of pain and discomfort and anger with himself and everybody else, the old man grew more comfortable, and proceeded to rule his family as usual. By dint of questioning the daily visitors who always flock about the victim of an accident in a country village, he had kept himself posted as to Tom Potter's absence; but its limit was drawing to an end now, and he took alarm. He had not imagined that Tom might be as well informed on his part, and that more than one note had passed through the post-office already between the young couple. Nor did he know that the postmistress was a warm friend of Tom's; for he had rescued her only child from the threatening horns of his father's Ayrshire bull, when little Fanny had ventured to cross the pas-

ture lot after strawberries, and her red shawl attracted that ill-conditioned quadruped's notice and aroused his wrath. Tom's correspondence was safe and secret in passing through aunty Leland's hands. But as soon as Reuben Fyler ceased to need doses from the drug store and ice from the tavern, Phœbe was kept within range of his eye and ear. Still, she knew Tom was at home now, and evening after evening his cheery whistle passed through the window as he sauntered by, — a signal to Phœbe to get outside if she could ; but she never could.

However, "Potter faculty" was at work for her. When the county paper was sent over from the post-office by a small boy, he had directions from aunty Leland to give it at once into Phœbe's hand, "and nobody else's." So he waited about till Phœbe opened the kitchen door to sweep out the dust, and gave it to her with a significant wink — not that he knew what his wink signified at all, but, with the true *gamin* instinct, he gathered an idea from the widow Leland's special instructions that "somethin' wuz to pay," as he expressed it to himself.

And Phœbe, as she hastened in from the door to carry the paper to her father's bedside, perceived on the margin, in a well-known handwriting, these words, "Look out for lambs." As she hung up her broom, she tore off the inscription and tossed it into the fire ; and then, while she patiently went through the gossip, politics, religion,

and weekly story of the "Slabtown News," exercised herself mightily as to what that mystic sentence might mean; but not till the soft and fragrant darkness of the June evening set in did she find a clew to the mystery.

Old Fyler had a few pure-blood merino sheep on his farm that were the very apple of his eye. Not that he had ever bought such expensive commodities; but a wealthy farmer in the next town owned a small flock some years before, which the New England nuisance of dogs at last succeeded in slaying or scattering. In some panic of the sort, one had escaped to the woods, and, after long straying, been found by Fyler, with a new-born pair of lambs beside her, in a wood on the limit of Pasco township, where he was cutting his winter supply. Of course this windfall was too valuable to be neglected. The hay brought for Jerry's dinner was made into a soft bed, and, with the help of an Irishman, who was chopping also, the sheep and her family lifted into the wagon and taken home. Pasco was not infested with dogs; only two or three could be numbered in the village. And after the old sheep was wonted to her quarters a little, fed by hand, cosseted, and made at home, she was turned into a lot with the cows. And woe betide any dog that intruded among the beautiful Ayrshires! So the sheep increased year after year, carefully sheltered in cold weather, as became their high breeding, till now between thirty and forty ranged the sweet short pastures of

the Fyler farm, and their fleeces were the wonder and admiration of all the town.

Late that night — late, I mean, for Pasco, for the old-fashioned nine-o'clock bell had but just rung, though Mrs. Fyler had gone to bed upstairs an hour ago, and Phœbe was just spreading an extempore bed on the lounge in the kitchen, to be where her father might call her in case of need — a piteous bleat, unmistakably the bleat of a lamb in some kind of distress, was heard outside. The old man started up from his pillow.

“What ’n thunder’s that, Phœbe?”

“Sounds some like a lamb.”

“Sounds like a lamb! Anybody’d think you was a durn fool. ’Tis a lamb, I tell ye. One o’ them leetle creturs hez strayed away out o’ the paddock. I ’xpect boys hez ben in there a-foolin’ round ’cause I ’m laid up abed. Lordy! I wish to the land I could smash that ’ere ingine. Go ’long out, gal, ’nd see to ’t. It ’ll stray a mile mebber ef ye don’t. You’ve got ter look out for lambs. They don’t know nothin’.”

Phœbe started as her father repeated the very phrase penciled on the edge of the paper; the lamb kept bleating, and the dimple in the girl’s rosy cheek deepened while she found her bonnet, and, turning the key of the kitchen door, stepped out into the starlit night. That lamb was evidently behind the woodshed, but so was somebody else; for Phœbe had hardly discerned its curly back in the shadow before she was grasped in a

stringent embrace, and Tom Potter actually kissed her.

“Go ’long!” she whispered indignantly. But Tom did not seem to mind her, and probably she became resigned to the infliction, for at least ten minutes elapsed before that go-between of a lamb was restored to its anxious mother in the paddock, and full half the time was wasted in a whispered dialogue — with punctuation marks.

Very rosy indeed Miss Phœbe looked as she returned to the house.

“Seems to me ye was everlastin’ long ’bout ketchin’ that lamb,” growled old Reuben.

“Well, I had to put it back, ’nd fix up the little gate. One hinge was off on ’t, ’nd ’t was kinder canted round, so ’s ’t the lamb got out, ’nd was too simple to get back.”

Oh, Phœbe! Well it was that no oath compelled the speaking of the whole truth — of who unhinged the gate, or who had the lamb safe by a long string, having previously captured it in the paddock for purposes of decoy, or how, indeed, a letter came to be in that calico pocket, making an alarming crackle whenever she moved, terribly loud to her, but silent to the sleepy old man in his bed.

Phœbe went about very thoughtful the next day. The letter contained an astounding proposition. It was an artful letter, too, for it began with a recital of all the difficulties that made the way of true love proverbially rugged, and convinced her

of what she had unconsciously admitted before, that she could never marry her lover in the world with her father's consent and the pleasant observances of ordinary life. Then it went on to plead in tender and manly fashion the writer's own affection; his ability to give her a pleasant and happy home, for he had just bought out the Pasco blacksmith shop, the owner thereof having moved to Hartford, where Tom had spent that week settling up the matter, and the smithy was a good business, being the only one in a wide radius. And it wound up with a proposal that as soon as her father got so much better that her mother could care for him alone, Phœbe should slip out some fine night on to the roof, thence to the top of the henhouse, and so to the ground, and meet Tom and his sister, who would be with him, at Peter Green's wood, half a mile away, and just at the edge of the Fyler farm. Phœbe was to consider the matter fully, and talk it over with her mother, and when she made up her mind, to put a letter in the corner of the cow-shed, where she milked daily, under a stone, where she would also find an answer, and probably other epistles thereafter.

Phœbe was not a girl to take such a proposal lightly. She did, indeed, consider it long and in earnest. Day by day, as her father grew better, with a rapidity astonishing in so old a man, — for Reuben Fyler's adventures are literally true, — he became more and more ill-tempered and exasperating. The pain of the knitting bones, the bed-

weariness, the constant fret over farm-work that was either neglected or hired out, worked on his naturally growling temper, and made life unpleasant to all around him as well as himself. Phœbe's mind was made up more by her father than even her own affection for Tom, or her mother's gentle encouragement. The old man vented his temper on Phœbe in the matter of Tom Potter more and more frequently; he reviled the Potter tribe, root and branch, in a radical and persistent way that would have done credit to an ancient Israelite cursing Canaan; he even taunted Phœbe with favoring such a chicken-hearted lover, scared with one slam of a door in his face; and Phœbe's inherited "grit" was taxed strongly to keep her tongue quiet lest she should betray her own secret; yet angry as she was, there was a glint of fun underlying her anger, to think how thoroughly Tom had countermined her father, which set the deep, lovely dimples in cheek and chin alight, and sparkled in each steady eye, almost belying the angry brow and set lips.

So it came about that she yielded to the inner pressure and the outer persuasion. Her father was able now to get about a little on crutches, and sit at the window overlooking the cow-shed; yet it was there, right under his suspicious eyes, that Phœbe took the time, while she was milking and her mother feeding a new-weaned calf, to unfold her plans.

"Mother," she began, with eyes fixed on her

pail, "I can't stand it any longer ; my mind's made up. I'm going to Tom, if you keep in the same mind you was."

"Yes, dear ; I think it is the best for both of us. But don't tell me any more about it than you can help. Tell me what you want me to do for you, but" —

"Yes, I know," answered Phœbe. "I don't want you to do anything, mother ; only you'll know if you miss me."

"Yes ; and I want to tell you, Phœbe. Several years back I've kinder taken comfort a-fixin' for this time. I've hed a chance now 'nd then to sew a little, 'nd I've made ye a set o' things when you was off to school odd times, 'nd washed 'em up' nd put 'em up chamber for ye in the old press drawers. Then I've laid up some little too, out of a dozen of eggs here, 'nd a little milk there, 'nd twenty gold dollars grandmother give me before she died. I guess there's nigh about fifty by this time ; and the black silk dress aunt Sary sent me from York, arter her Sam spent that year here, never's ben cut. You better take that to Taunton to-morrer to be made."

"Oh, mother !"

"Well, dear, you're all I've got. Why should n't I? Oh, that pesky calf !" and just in time to divert sentiment into a safer channel, the calf threw up its head, knocked the good woman backward into the dirt, and with tail high in air, and its four feet apparently going four ways at once, began one

of those wild canters about the yard which calves indulge in. Phœbe had to laugh, as her mother, indignant but unhurt, rose up from the ground, and old Fyler at the kitchen window grinned with amusement. So Phœbe transported her modest fitting-out little by little to Julia Potter, who was her only confidante in the matter, and could not even see Phœbe, but punctually went for the bundles, when Tom was notified that they would be left in the further barn, which opened on another road, for better convenience in haying. The black silk dress also was consigned to her care, with Phœbe's new bonnet, sent by express from Taunton along with the dress.

The day set for Phœbe's departure was the 3d of July, since the racket and wakefulness which pervade even country towns on this anniversary would make Tom's late drive less noticeable. In the afternoon of the sultry day ominous flashes of tempest began to play about the far horizon, whence all day long great "thunder-caps" had rolled their still and solemn heights of rounded pearl and shadow upward through the stainless blue of heaven. Phœbe gave her mother a stringent hug and kiss on the stairs as she went up, little knowing how that mother's heart sank in her breast, or how dim were the sad eyes that dared not let a tear fall to relieve them. By nine o'clock the house was still, except for low mutterings of the storm and distant wheels hurrying through the night, which made Phœbe's heart beat wildly. She made a small

bundle of needful things, wrapped it in a little shawl, put on her hat, and, taking her shoes in her hand, slipped softly out of the window to the shed roof, and thence to the ground. She felt like a guilty thing enough as she stole over the hencoop and roused the fluttering fowls, bringing out an untimely crow from one young rooster. But the thought of Tom and her father nerved her to action. Putting on her shoes hastily, she took a bee-line for Green's wood, where, at the corner of a certain fence, she was to find Tom and Julia. The storm was coming up now rapidly, but Phœbe did not feel any fear; the frequent flashes blinded her, but the road was plain after she had passed through the home lots and found the highway; and she met no one, as she had feared, for even those irrepressible patriots, the boys, had sought shelter from probable rain that would spoil their powder and wet their fire-crackers. But when Phœbe arrived at the rendezvous, her heart beat thick with trouble or fear, for no one was there. She knew Tom had got her letter; he had left a rapturous answer in its place, but what had kept him?

She sat down among the sweet-fern bushes and tufts of long grass to quiet herself and think, and being a cool-headed, reasonable girl, composed herself to the idea that something had delayed her lover, and she must have patience; but as the minutes went on long and slow enough, the thunder pealing loud and louder, the lightning darting

swift lances from heaven to earth, and a sharp rush of rain rattling on the stiff oak leaves above her, Phœbe determined to go home ; not without a certain indignation in her heart at the carelessness of the man who ought to have been not only ready, but waiting to receive her, but also a reserve of judgment, for she had a great trust in Tom. Drenched to the skin, and chilled by the cold wind that rose with the storm, she retraced her steps, and dragging a short ladder from the cow-shed, contrived to get back on the roof, wet and slippery as it was ; but to her dismay and wonder the window of her room was not only shut, but tightly fastened, and the paper shade let down before it. Her father, waking with the noise of the heavy thunder, bethought himself of the lambs in the paddock, not being certain that Phœbe had remembered to fold them. He got up and hobbled to the stairs, calling her loudly, but with no reply. In vain his wife urged him to lie down while she called Phœbe ; he wanted to scold her awake, and with pains and groans he drew himself up the stairs, only to find her bed untouched and her window open. At once the state of things flashed upon him ; he did not swear, but setting his lips at their utmost vicious angle, shut and fastened the window, and let down the shade, fancying Phœbe had gone out to meet her lover, and would try to return.

“ I ’ve fixed the jade,” was his first utterance, as he reëntered his own room. “ She ’s gone ’nd

slipped out o' the winder for to meet that darned Potter feller. See ef she 'll git in agin. A good wettin' down 'll sarve her right."

"Oh, Reuben!" remonstrated his wife.

"You shet up. She's got to ketch it, I tell ye," he growled back; and his wife, consoled by the belief that her darling was by that time in kindly hands, lay down again and slept, to be roused an hour after by a loud knocking at the back door.

"What ye want?" demanded the old man, who had not slept, but waited for this result.

"It's me, father," said Phœbe's resolute voice. "Let me in; I'm out in the rain."

Mrs. Fyler sprang from her bed, but Reuben caught her arm and pulled her back.

"You lie still, I tell ye," he growled; and then went on, in a louder key, "Folks don't come into my door by night onless they've gone out on't."

"Let me in, father; it's me, — Phœbe. I'm wet through."

The poor mother made one more effort to rise, but was held with vise-like grasp, as her lord and master retorted, —

"No wet folks wanted here. You could ha' staid in ef you'd ha' wanted to keep dry."

Phœbe's spirit rose at the taunt. Had she been let in, even to receive the expected indignation and scolding, there would have been no second exploit of the kind, for she was thoroughly disgusted with herself and partially with her lover; but when steel strikes steel, it is only to elicit sparks. Her

"Fyler grit" took possession of her. Picking up her soaked bundle, she set out for the Potter farm, which lay two long miles away, on a hillside, and was approached by a wood road as well as the highway. But the wood road was the shortest and most lonely. She was sure to meet no one in that grassy track. So she struck into it at once.

A weary walk it proved. The storm went on with unabated fury. Rain poured fiercely down. Her rough way was full of stones, of fallen boughs, and crossed by new-made brooks from the mountain springs, suddenly filled and overflowing. But, with stubborn courage, Phœbe kept on, though more than once she fell at length among the dripping weeds and grasses, and was sorely bruised by stones and jarred by the fall.

But it was a resolved and rosy face that presented itself when the kitchen door of the farmhouse on Potter Hill opened to a firm, sharp knock. There were friendly lights in the windows, and Mrs. Potter's kind old countenance beamed with pity and surprise as she beheld Phœbe on the doorstep.

"Mercy's sakes alive, Phœbe! You be half drowned, child. Come in, come in, quick! Where's Tom and July?"

"Well," said Phœbe, with a little laugh, "that's just what I'd like to know."

"You don't mean to say they hain't fetched ye? Why, how under the canopy did ye get here?"

So Phœbe told her tale of woe, while her wet

clothes were taken off by the old lady (who was watching for the party, and had sent the "help" and the younger part of the family to bed hours ago), and was told, in her turn, how Tom and his sister had set off at half past eight, and how they had been expected back "ever 'nd ever so long," so that Phœbe was supposed to have come with them when she appeared.

"I'll bet a cent that colt's run away. Tom would take the colt. He thought the old hoss was kinder feeble 'nd slow-goin'. But I'd ruther ha' took him — slow 'nd sure, ye know."

Here was food for anxiety; but it did not last long, for wheels rattled up from the highway side of the house, an angry "Whoa, whoa, I tell ye!" was heard outside, and in a moment Tom strode in, half carrying his sister, wet with rain and crying.

"Take care o' Jule, mother; she's about dead. There ain't a cent's worth o' grit in her."

A low laugh stopped him very suddenly. He looked round, and there, by the little blaze in the chimney, which had been lit to warm her a cup of tea, sat Phœbe, rosy, smiling, and prettier than ever, in Julia's pink calico gown and a soft white shawl of his mother's.

"Tom! Tom! you'll get her all damp again!" screamed Mrs. Potter; from which it may be inferred what Tom was about.

However, Phœbe seemed to be used to dampness. Perhaps the night's experience had hard-

ened her, for she made no effort to withdraw from this present second-hand shower, while Tom explained how the colt had been frightened, just as they drove by the post-office, at a giant cracker, and dashed off down the meadow road at full speed. This would not have mattered if a sudden jolt had not broken one side of the thills short off, whereupon the colt kicked and plunged till he broke the other, and with a sudden dash pulled Tom all but out of the wagon, tore the reins out of his hands, and set off at full speed, leaving them three miles from Green's wood, two from any house, with a broken wagon, no horse, and an approaching tempest. There was nothing to do but to walk back to the village, hire another "team," and through the pouring storm drive to Green's wood on the chance of seeing Phœbe.

Naturally they did not see her; and then Tom in despair drove round to Reuben Fyler's house, whistled under Phœbe's window, rattled pebbles against the pane, and at last knocked at the door, but with no sign or answer to reward him. Then Julia insisted on being taken home, and Tom was forced to yield, since he was at his wits' end, and there he found Phœbe.

"Tom, be still!" was the irrelevant remark uttered by Phœbe at the end of the recital, and she blushed more rosily than ever as she said it.

But Mrs. Potter, with motherly sense, served the hot supper that had been covered up in the chimney-corner so long, and when it had been

done justice to in the most unsentimental manner, sent the whole party peremptorily to their rooms.

In the morning the runaway colt was brought home bright and early, and Tom put him into the borrowed wagon and drove off with Phœbe, Julia, and his mother to the minister's house, where Parson Russell gave him undeniable rights to run away with Phœbe hereafter as much as he liked.

The news came quickly to her father's ears, and, strange to say, the old man chuckled. Perhaps his comments will explain. "Stumped it all the way up there in the dark, did she? thunderin' an' lightnin' too. Well, now, I tell ye, there ain't another gal in Pasco darst to ha' done it. She's clear Fyler. Our folks ain't made o' all dust; they 're three quarter grit, you kin swear to't. The darned little cretur! she beats all. Well! well! well! Wife, hain't you heerd what aunt Nabby's a-sayin'?"

"Yes, I did."

"Law, Mr. Fyler," put in aunt Nabby, "I thought ye'd be madder 'n a yaller hornet."

"So ye come to hear me buzz, did ye? 'Tain't safe to reckon on 'folks. Mis' Fyler, you fetch your bunnet; I'll tell Sam to harness up, 'nd you drive up to Potter's 'nd see the gal. She's a chip o' the old block. I guess I'll let her hev that 'ere brown 'nd white heifer for a settin' up. 'Tain't best, nuther, to fight with the blacksmith, when there ain't but one handy."

"Well, now, I am beat," muttered aunt Nabby.

"I thought ye'd ha' held out ugly to the day o' judgment, I've heern tell so much about Fyler grit."

"I think it's likely," was the composed reply. "It's bad ye're disapp'inted, ain't it? but did n't it never come to ye that it takes more grit to back down hill than to go 'long up it?"

"Mebbe it doos—mebbe it doos," said aunt Nabby, shaking her head with the wisdom of an owl.

MARY ANN'S MIND.

“The lobster loves the lobster pot,
The mackerel loves the sea,
And I, I love but thee, Mary Ann;
Mary Ann, Mary Ann; Mary Ann,
Mary Ann; Mary Ann, I love but thee!”

JAKE HAZARD shouted out this snatch of sea song at the top of his pleasant voice, as he pushed his old whaleboat off the beach on the reluctant rollers, and at last launched her in the water.

“That ’s tellin’, ain’t it?” inquired Hosy Long, with a comic cast of his eye across the boat at Jake, as he shoved at her other side with brawny shoulders and deep breaths of effort.

“Haw, haw!” roared Jake. “Ain’t you smart, Hosy? I ’xpect you can see through a millstone’s quick’s the next man!”

Hosy grinned horribly; he was not a brilliant creature, but he could catch fish better than any man on the shore, and when you go bluefishing that’s the sort of companion you want.

Now everybody in Sandy Creek knew Jake Hazard was mortally in love with Mary Ann Tucker; he had made no secret of it, and she, being a born coquette, treated Jake in cat-and-mouse fashion, till he was as nearly crazy as a hard-

headed young fellow with no nerves and a mighty digestion can possibly be. If I said Mary Ann was the prettiest girl in the town I should do her great injustice; for she was the only pretty girl there; the two or three tanned, freckled, good-natured daughters of the Hazards, and Tuckers, and Conklins, who were "the girls" of Sandy Creek, never pretended to be pretty; they went their way in peace, dug clams, baked short-cakes, made chowder, and darned stockings, undisturbed by lovers or rivalry; in due time somebody married them, because everybody could n't marry Mary Ann, and thereafter they lived their lives out as they might; but at Mary Ann's feet, sooner or later, every young man in the town bowed down and fell.

She was a very pretty girl. Her long thick hair, of the darkest, richest red, waved in great loose ripples to her knees when it fell out of the heavy braid in which she wore it. Her skin was fair beyond all tanning, and if it was a little freckled nobody saw it in the abundant and lovely color of her rounded cheeks. A low, wide forehead, a dimpled chin, a saucy nose, full scarlet lips, and a pair of wicked, laughing, dark eyes, with lashes and brows of deep brown-red, make up a fair catalogue of charms.

And then she was "everlastin' smart." Nobody kept so clean a house as she did for her father, nobody made such sea-pie, chowder, or clam fritters. She fried fish to such crisp perfection that

the lighthouse people always wanted to stop at Sam Tucker's when they had city company and took them out fishing, but Miss Mary Ann did not approve of "keepin' tavern," she said, so the light-keeper had to fry his own fish. Then she was exquisitely neat, — a virtue rare among a fishing people familiar with the unsavory produce of their nets, as heads, tails, or shells lie about the doors, odorous if not ornamental, till the very hens' eggs have a fishy flavor. But Sam Tucker's doorstep was always swept of every grain of sand or bit of refuse. Two little posy beds boarded up against the wall sweetened the air with pinks, sweet basil, and a few hardy roses in their season; there was a scrupulously white bit of a curtain across every little window, and the well-scrubbed floors had bright rugs here and there where foot of man might rest, and save the planks needless stain or spot. If the curtains were old cotton or bits of sailcloth, they were still snow white; and that the rugs were braided of rags, scarlet shirts worn beyond any more patching, or the remains of a bright blue petticoat or a gray vest, and black list which the tailoress gave away, did not make them less gay and tasteful in tint.

Old Sam's clothes were patched with such neat patches, the buttons so invariable, the red shirt always so bright, that he was a matter of wonder and admiration all along shore. And if Mary Ann did her housework and scoured her tins and floor, and weeded her posy bed, protected by a big

crash bib apron and a slat-sided sunbonnet, when the apron came off, and she sat down to knit or sew, or strolled on the beach in the afternoon, then she was always arrayed in a neat and pretty calico gown or a deep blue gingham; always with some white thing about her round throat,—not the least shade of fashion, to be sure, but a clean and pure ruffle, or a queer old collar clear-starched to perfection, or a strip of coarse lace tied in such a trim bow. When you capped this full, wholesome figure and clean attire with the beautiful, saucy, rosy face, shining under a wide black straw hat that Sam Tucker bought for his “gal” years ago in Boston, half with an idea that it was respectful in her to have “a black bunnet,” as he called it, because her mother was dead (poor woman, she had been dead six years then), and half because, having seen a very pretty girl at White Rocks, where he went every year to take out sailing parties, with just such a hat, he thought Mary Ann would become it,—then, though you did not see a Broadway belle, you saw a wonderfully pretty girl, especially when the old black hat was set off by a plume of waving grass from the salt marsh, a cluster of pink wild roses, a string of glittering yellow shells, a garland of gay sea mosses, or a pompon of rich goldenrod put in with the artistic effect a French milliner’s fingers might have longed to imitate, and longed in vain. Moreover, the girl had a good straight shape of her own; there was room in the shapely chest for a cheery, ringing

voice that was the delight of old Sam as it trolled the quaint songs of the fisherman or a good loud Methodist hymn, and her strong arms, if they were not white, were both round and dimpled.

No wonder Mary Ann had so many lovers. Perhaps no wonder that she did not choose one. It is pleasant as well as provident to have a good many strings to your bow, and when Jake Hazard had to go bluefishing in earnest, not for fun, and she did not want to be crowded with dead fish, and wet lines, and two or three men, into a dirty boat all day long, there was always Joe Tucker or Ephraim Conklin to go after berries with her, or some other Conklin, or Tucker, or Hazard to take her crabbing, or shoot peeps for her, rewarded thereafter by a supper of crabs or peep pie, savory meats which Mary Ann perfectly understood preparing. So she really never seemed to care about marrying anybody. She had her father to look after, and time enough to enjoy her youth, and her beauty, and her adorers. But all this profited the adorers nothing. She eluded any grasp that might fix her anywhere, like a sagacious swallow that will wheel and flit about your head if you sit still enough, but if you move hand or foot darts off into space with a derisive twitter, and is seen no more. So the lovers gradually dropped off. They would have given their very best possessions to move her careless heart, but it was evident that all the inducements they could offer were useless. They were practical beings, men wanting

a home and a wife to keep the home and them tidy and thrifty. Sentiment being put out of the question, they turned to the creed of "the fat-faced curate Edward Bull : " —

"A pretty face is well, and this is well,
To have a dame indoors, that trims us up,
And keeps us tight,"

finding plenty of good, honest girls in the scattered village, less coy and scornful than the beauty of Sandy Creek. But Jake Hazard remained faithful ; his nature was strong and true. The quips and cranks of his fun and good-humor were but the crest of foam bells on a forceful and persistent depth, a constant and mighty tide setting toward one shore. Perhaps Mary Ann did not perceive this fact ; perhaps she thought him gay and careless, as young men are apt to be. It certainly never crossed her mind, as a real and earnest question, whether she meant to marry Jake, or even if he meant to marry her ; but on his part the matter was thoroughly settled, though till to-day he had never spoken of it. Perhaps it was the brilliant day, for it was June, and the air was vivid with sky above and sea below, and the cool salt breath of the ocean inspired even languid lungs and fainting vitality like a powerful elixir. The great green waves reared up along the shore, shaking white crests of foam in splendid defiance, and dashing their mighty length upon the sand, crumbled back with hissing crush of ten thousand tiny bubbles on their line, only to rise and charge again

with swing, and roar, and crash, till the shore trembled. Outside, the long waves swung the old whaleboat up and down with mad delight. The bluefish leaped at the bait with eager, venomous heads, and tore and plunged when they felt the hook, showing such fight that it was keen sport to draw them, gleaming and jumping, through the water and over the gunwale, and throw them on to the glistening heap that already covered the bottom. Jake's gray eyes glowed with excitement, the blood rose in his tanned cheek, his white teeth showed, set and firm, under the half-open lips, and his swaying muscular figure would have been a fine study for an artist.

"Ginger! this here's sport, ain't it?" sung out Hosy Long.

"Pretty good, pretty good!" Jake shouted back to him, setting his teeth together in a short, sharp contest with the biggest bluefish of the haul, which in another minute lay flapping and bounding at Hosy's feet.

"Dang it all! that's a most monstrous fish, Jake."

"That's the sockdolager, old feller."

"Well, naow," said Hosy, keeping the boat rimmed carefully while Jake rebaited his line, 'that 'ere one would be tasty for supper, I tell *you*, briled on the coals, 'nd buttered up, long o' a good shortcake 'nd some store tea."

Hosy paused and gloated on the fine fat fish with blinking green eyes and broad red face, that

was the picture of good-humor. Then he took to speech again : —

“Ef you ’d got an old woman naow, Jake, to your house, I ’xpect you ’nd me would have a frustrate supper for one time, would n’t we ?”

“I reckon,” answered Jake, feeling on his taut line to see if it were stretched by the ebbing tide or a pulling fish. “An’ what’s more, Hosy, I’m goin’ to hev a house ’n’ home afore I’m gray, I tell ye.”

“Lor, naow! you be? What does Mary Ann say to thet sarcumstance?”

“She’s got to say somethin’ afore long. I’m tired o’ foolin’,” muttered Jake between his teeth, giving a vicious jerk to his line, which was raging up and down at the mercy of another fish, which, however, he speedily hauled in and added to the flapping heap. “I say, Hosy, ’tain’t no good to flounder round on a hook. I’d get off on’t ef I tore my jaw out, soon’s I found ’t was for sport folks was ketchin’ me; bizness’s another matter.”

“Wall, wall, she’s a young cretur. Mebbe she dono what she doos want.”

“That ain’t my sitooation by the Lord, sir! I know what I want eunnyway, and I’ll hev it or let it go, smack and smooth, afore new moon comes agin, or my name ain’t Jake Hazard.”

Hosy’s simple soul quivered at the stern and almost fierce energy of Jake’s declaration. Not that he was afraid himself, but he saw breakers

ahead, as he would have phrased it, storms of passion and excitement, an end to quiet fishing bouts with Jake, lazy, pleasant strolls after blueberries with Mary Ann, and cozy suppers at Sam Tucker's. He was an ease-loving, weak-kneed brother, ready to sell what he called his soul at any time for peace or pottage, the very type of man who wrecks his own life and ruins others for the want of a little courage and candor, whose cry was always the selfish howl of "Let *me* alone," "after me the deluge." But Hosy's lazy longing for peace could work no wreck or woe in Jake's affairs, though he made a feeble effort to "save the pieces" in an interview with Mary Ann that very night, being deputed, as soon as they came in with their spoils, to carry the big fish up to Sam Tucker's as a present from Jake. Mary Ann met him with beaming eyes.

"Well, I declare, that's jest what I wanted, for aunt Semanthy's come to supper, 'nd uncle Royal, and I had n't a special thing for 'em, — bread, 'n' butter, 'n' sass, 'n' dried halibut, that's all."

"This is the king o' the crowd," said Hosy, looking at the beautiful silver-bellied, blue-backed creature with honest admiration. "I guess he made 'em fly down below. He come up with a rush naow, I tell ye, but Jake was too much for him. Jake's a masterful critter as ever I see. Say, Mary Ann," and here his voice fell into an ominous whisper, "you look out for Jake. Counsel with me naow. Ef I be a poor feller I've got sense

into me. You let Jake hev his head giner'lly. 'T will be a vast better for you ef ye do."

"What *air* you a-talkin' about, Hosy Long?" retorted Mary Ann with an air of genuine astonishment.

"Oh, nothin', nothin' much, nothin' pertikler, only 'f I was you I would n't be the one to get ath'art o' Jake's hawse, not ef"—

"I'd jist hev you to know, sir," snapped Mary Ann, the quick color rising "angry and brave," in her glowing cheeks,— "I'd jist hev, you to know that Jake Hazard's nothin' to me, nor I ain't goin' to cotton to no man because he's masterful. I guess I can be masterful myself, if I'm a mind to, so there." With which shake out of her flag she slammed the door in Hosy's face, and that dejected being bewailed himself plaintively enough.

"Oh, Lord! I've gone an' done it naow, ef I never did afore. I hope to glory 'n' goodness she won't never tell Jake. I'm darned to thunderation ef I don't believe she will! Oh, Jeerus'lem!"

And Hosy betook himself to the fish house, scratching his sandy poll ruefully as he went, but resolved to say nothing to Jake, and to answer everything he might be asked thereafter with wholesale and persistent denial.

Yet after all he had done Jake an unconscious service, for Mary Ann was fully and fairly brought to ask herself if what she had just now said in her sudden anger was really the truth. Suppose Hosy told Jake what she *did* say, and he took it for

granted that she really did not care for him at all? It was a small point to rankle in Mary Ann's mind, but it was the point of a wedge. She cooked the big bluefish for supper with her usual skill, and while its crisp brown surface and creamy flakes of flesh were being disposed of, with sundry flattering remarks both to fisherman and cook, she fretted inwardly a little, while she was pleased enough with the commendations.

But Mary Ann was not metaphysical — there are some benefits after all in a want of education; if you do not know how to analyze your emotions, and take your "inwardness" to pieces as a botanist does a flower, you are spared much futile speculation into profitless subjects, much soul-wearying and unhappy consciousness, and may live and die even as a blossom in simple trust and peace. Mary Ann went about her work with no special self-torment after the first uneasy idea of Jake and his possibilities had entered her mind. If she thought of him a little oftener, and remembered what uncle R'yal had said about "them Hazards," as a family, and how aunt Semanthy had echoed, "Yis; they 're dreadful reliable folks, allers was. Gran'ther Hazard was one of the smartest men ever ye see. Good for a fishin' bout up to ninety year old; spry as a cricket; did n't hev no sickness so to speak durin' his lifetime, an' died of a shockanum palsy to the last." Why, all this was what she knew before, so she thought no more about it the next day, but hurried her work

over, and putting on her hat, took a basket and set her face inland toward a hill where wild strawberries grew thick and sweet. There was a long walk before her across the fields, and the sandy lanes were too heavy to choose as a path when the short turf lay crisply in the lots, so she stepped over the low wall of loose stone, and thereby came within the range of Jake's vision just as he dragged his boat up the beach, having been across the bay to the lighthouse. He overtook her soon with his long strides, and Mary Ann was glad enough to have company. With a certain native tact, Jake forbore to intrude his passion on her notice till the basket was filled with fragrant berries, and they sat down a moment for a rest on a fallen tree. Neither of them consciously admired nature, but yet they felt a serene calm that hung over the view spread out before them, — the gently heaving, beryl sea, the still, blue heaven, the distant and incessant murmur of white waves lapping the shore, the dull green fields bordered with tawny sand, and far away the lighthouse tower and the sailing ships that drifted to or from the wide horizon, all these stole into their senses and kept them silent for a while, but Jake's heart burned within him. It was not his way to put off a crisis, to mince matters ; he was full of curt courage and resolve, and now he had business of mortal import to him to settle with Mary Ann, he neither could nor would delay it, so he broke the silence somewhat abruptly : —

"Mary Ann," said he, "I suppose you've seen quite a spell that I like you frustrate. I've spoke it loud enough in actions, but I know folks has got to use words sometimes ef they want answers, and I do want one the wust way. Will you marry me, Mary Ann?"

The hot color rushed up to the girl's face. She was startled, and a traitorous echo in her own heart startled her more than Jake's words. She had a bunch of sweet fern in her hand, and she began to pull the odorous leaves off one by one, as an excuse for keeping her eyes cast down.

"Will you? Say!" repeated Jake.

"We-ell, I dono, Jake. I hain't thought o' such a thing."

The coquettish nature was uppermost now. Her lips curled at the corners with a wicked little smile, her eyes sparkled, and her voice grew arch.

"Time you did," retorted Jake. "I've been a-hangin' round ye this two year, 's though the sun rose 'nd sot in your face, 'nd I can't stan' it no longer. I want to know suthin' for sartin, Mary Ann."

"Well — you see," slowly pulling the fern leaves, "I don't — know — I haven't made up — my mind yet — about marryin'."

"Make it up now, then."

"Mercy to me, Jake Hazard. What an idea — no, sir; I ain't a-goin' to hurry for nobody. I can live 'thout gettin' married, I guess, ef you can't."

"I didn't say I could n't," growled Jake. "I don't calkerlate to die for nobody; but I sha'n't marry nobody but you, Mary Ann Tucker, and I want to know ef I 'm goin' to do that."

Mary Ann gave a little laugh. It was not heartless, though it seemed so to Jake, who was in dead earnest. It was merely an outlet of the inner excitement she really felt, and she followed it up with the truth, though she spoke it with a certain levity. "I don't see how you're going to know when I don't know myself. I told ye I had n't made up my mind."

"Well, how long is it goin' to take ye to do it?" ventured the wrathful lover, who longed to shake her soundly for her naughtiness, thoroughly misunderstanding her, as men will misunderstand women till the day of judgment, especially if they are in love with them.

"I don't know that," she answered.

Jake controlled his rising rage manfully. "Well, then," said he, rising, and looking down at her, "I give ye notice, Mary Ann, I shall keep askin' till I find out; onless I 'm onlucky enough to b'lieve you don't want to know yerself."

She laughed again, but made no answer. They walked silently down the hill together, and parted at her door. Mary Ann meant to have asked him in to tea, for she was about to prepare that barbarous dainty, a strawberry shortcake, for supper, aunt Semantly having brought down from her farm a pail of cream the day before. But

Jake had unwittingly deprived himself of the feast; and even if Mary Ann had not been too disturbed to ask him, both luscious berries and unctuous shortcake would have been gall and bitterness to his lips, for he was terribly disappointed. Perhaps he would not have been so miserable if she had said "No," finally. There are some natures to which suspense is worse than despair; and his was one of that sort.

Mary Ann, fortunately for herself, had an absorbing object in view, besides her housework. There was to be a clam-bake at Point Peter on the Fourth of July, at which all the village of Sandy Creek, even to the babies in arms, expected to be present, and long ago she had promised Jake to go in his boat; not alone, for Hosy Long and Anny Hazard, and Joe Conklin and his wife, were of that boatload, as well as her father; so that her late interview with Jake need not embarrass her on this occasion. But she had to make a new dress and some fresh ruffles, both necessitating a drive to Natick Pier, the nearest village; and then the shaping and sewing of the festive attire at home, after it was bought, occupied her head and hands for at least two weeks, in the intervals of housework.

Jake thought of her all the time, on sea and land; dreamed of her by night, and sung about her by day, — when he was alone, and far enough from shore to be unheard. Nor did he leave her quite at peace; for once, as she sat on the door-

step busily stitching at her gown, the sunlight gilding her burnished hair, and deepening the hue of her bright cheeks and lips, Jake came up from the shore, and suddenly darkened those level western rays with stern and sad aspect.

"Have you made up your mind, Mary Ann?" he asked her distinctly and sorrowfully.

Mary Ann was vexed; this was too much. She snapped back pertly enough, "No, I have n't, and I sha'n't never if you're a-goin' to pester me so!"

"Yes, you will," was the deliberate reply, much in the tone of a schoolmaster to a naughty boy, and Jake walked away. If he had turned to look back he would have seen her crying bitterly, half with rage, it is true, but at least half because he walked away.

Another week went by, and one hot afternoon Mary Ann and three or four of her friends had gone down to bathe. The girls at Sandy Creek knew how to swim, as well as the boys; and these extempore mermaids liked to splash about in the fresh coolness of the water almost as if they had been the genuine kind, though there was nothing siren in their aspect. They had bathed and dressed, and were going home from the retired little cove which was set apart for their use, when Jake Hazard appeared, carrying an armful of fishing tackle, bait, scoop, and lines, and a big basket of fish. His way home lay by Sam Tucker's door, while the rest went further down the beach. Mary Ann walked on a little before him, her long drip-

ping tresses hanging to her knees, coiling and curling, as the salt breeze blew them about her, in a thousand darkly shining rings, and her white, shapely ankles betrayed by the short skirt she wore, for the day was so hot that she had gone barefoot to the beach. They went along in silence, till, just as they reached the door, Jake said, in a low voice, perfectly audible, however, to this one hearer: —

“Mary Ann, have you made up your mind?”

Mary Ann was exasperated. Who would not have been? She faced Jake with the look of a creature at bay in her dark eyes. “No, sir! and I never ’ll find it till you stop pesterin’, there!”

Jake looked at her, full-faced, with a determined expression that almost daunted her. “I never shall stop — till I know,” he answered gravely; and went his way.

Mary Ann was angry; but she was also scared. When a man falls back on his masculine supremacy, the eternal fitness of things demands that a woman shall give way. And she does, though she may not always show it. Mary Ann began to feel, rather than to think, that Jake was, in her fashion of speech, “the biggest,” and from that moment began to find out that she loved him. Yet she would not tell him so.

The Fourth of July came at last, — bright, hot, beaming, as holiday weather should be, — and at nine o’clock Mary Ann’s fire was out, her house was in order, her big basket of bread, butter, cold

coffee, and pickles neatly packed, her father sitting on the doorstep, and she beside him, waiting for the boat. A pretty picture they made, — Sam in his Sunday clothes, with his coat over his arm, his spotless shirtsleeves scarce whiter than the silvery hair that showed under his brown felt hat, and his wrinkled, kindly face and keen, dark eye pleasant as the day itself; and Mary Ann, in the new pink-and-white calico, her pretty head rising from a full, soft ruffle, clear and snowy, and her old black hat smartened up with a white muslin scarf about the crown, and a bunch of pinks, from the posy bed, fastened in the bow, their clean, spicy breath perfuming the air about her.

Jake Hazard looked at her with adoring eyes. His mind was made up even more than usual, if that were possible; for he had devised a plan, to be carried out that very day, which should, once for all, end his suspense; since he too had concluded, in the spirit of the old distich: —

“ He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all.”

Certainly Mary Ann would not have gone toward her fate — as well as the boat — with such a happy and smiling face, had she known what was before her.

The journey over to Point Peter was delightful. A light breeze filled the sail, and flapped the long red pennant above it. There was plenty of fun

and laughter ; Jake himself seemed as gay as the rest, and Mary Ann owned to herself, as she looked at him furtively from under her broad hat, that he was "awful good-looking !" And less prejudiced observers might agree with her. Jake's simple costume of white duck trousers and a dark blue flannel shirt, a wide-brimmed straw hat, set well on the thick curls of his fine head, and the keen animation of his clear-cut, honest face below it, were certainly picturesque.

They landed at Point Peter in the best of humors ; and immediately the preparations for the clam-bake began, for the rest of the company were there before them. For a wonder all went right ; there were no mishaps, no vexations. The simple fisher-folk, in their primitive fashion, enjoyed the rare holiday to the top of their bent. After dinner, Jake proposed to Mary Ann that they should take a rowboat and go up Natick Bay to Blueberry Island, where the low blueberries already dotted the turf with dwarf brush loaded with turquoise spheres.

"If Hosy and Anny will go," said Mary Ann.

So Hosy was sent after Anny, and Mary Ann walked down to the boat with Jake, and sitting down on one of the seats, with her face shoreward, to watch for the others, Jake, being behind her, silently put the oars in place, and with one sudden sweep of his powerful arms drove it off. Mary Ann cried out.

"Well," tranquilly replied Jake, "we might as well be rowin' round till they come."

But Mary Ann observed that, instead of "row-in' round," the boat headed straight for the mouth of the bay, and remonstrated accordingly.

"Well, well, Mary Ann, I'll just put ye ashore on the Rock, 'nd go back and fetch 'em along, ef you say so. You 've always hankered to go onto the Rock, you said, when we was comin' over."

The Rock was a little bare islet, with one dwarf cedar on it, stunted and spread by driving rain and furious winds into the rough shape of an umbrella, and commonly reputed to be a wonderful place for pretty pebbles. Mary Ann cared less for the pebbles than for getting out of a *tête-à-tête* with Jake, so she jumped at the proposition. Now the Rock was quite out of sight of Point Peter, and full a mile away. Jake drew his prow close to the abrupt edge of the islet, where one upward step safely landed his passenger, drove the boat a single stroke's length off, and then, deliberately drawing in his oars, spoke as follows:—

"Now, Mary Ann, I've bobbed at the end of your string as long as is reasonable; I can't do it no more. There you be, and here I be; and here both of us 'll stay till you've finally made up your mind."

Mary Ann was dumb. She was stunned for a moment; then she was angry.

"How dare you, Jake Hazard!"

"Well, you see, I've got to a pitch where I darst do a'most anything."

Mary Ann looked at his set mouth, his steady,

resolute eyes, his air of stern self-possession, and felt that he spoke the simple truth. But it was not in her to give up. She saw, or rather felt, very plainly that she did not want to lose him; that she liked him very, very much; but not the less did she feel rebellious and outraged by this extraordinary proceeding.

“It’s fair to tell you one thing, Mary Ann,” he began again. “If you fin’ly make up your mind ag’inst me, I shall never fault you for’t. I shall clear out o’ these parts for the future. I could n’t stay here.” An unconscious tremor and sadness thrilled in these last words; and Mary Ann felt it. She saw, in a flash of imagination, what Sandy Creek would be without Jake. Indeed, all her own life! But even this did not move her outwardly; she sat quite still on the stone; she forgot all about the pebbles; she only thought of Jake’s demand, and resolved never to yield to it, if she stayed there a week. And she might have sat there long enough to discomfit her jailer and herself both, had not a certain sound approached her ears,—for the wind had suddenly veered round to the east,—a dip of slowly pulling oars. And in a deep, nasal voice, which she recognized as Hossy Long’s, the following ’longshore ditty, coming nearer and nearer, from the direction of Point Peter, resounded distinctly:—

“Uncle Keziah and his son Sam
They went to sea in the shell of a clam,
A-o-utside o’ the P’int!

"They put up the hellum an' put her abaout,
The sea it went in an' Sam he went aout,
A-o-utside o' the P'int !

"Uncle Keziah he cussed an' he swore
He 'd ne'er go to sea in a shell any more,
A-o-utside o' the P'int ! "

Women are "cur'us creturs," as Hosity was wont to remark : whether it was the terror of approaching observers, or the ludicrous drawl of Hosity's song, or the weary waiting and heat, or some fierce and subtler influence she knew not how to name, suddenly Mary Ann's heart gave way without her will or wish, she broke down utterly, and with an unconcealed sob of agitation stretched out both hands to Jake.

"Come !" she said, and when Jake took her in his strong arms and lifted her into the boat like a big baby, he knew from the soft, shy look in her beautiful eyes and the lingering of her arm upon his shoulder that Mary Ann had made up her mind at last, and that he need n't go away forever. Before either of them could speak, Hosity appeared round the corner.

"Wa'al," shouted he, "this is kinder upsettin' ; why could n't ye wait for a feller ? "

"We did wait a minute," laughed Jake. "We was comin' back for ye. Mary Ann wanted to land on the Rock to look for somethin' she lost t' other day."

"Did she find it ? " asked the interested Hosity.

"No, — I did," dryly replied Jake, and Mary

Ann looked over the gunwale into the water. She has always professed to Jake that she never did or would forgive him ; but Jake only laughs, knowing very well that there is no happier or sweeter wife and mother on all the shore than Mary Ann Hazard, and that in her secret heart she is very glad he made her know her own mind, however he did it !

LOVE.

DEACON GOODWIN and I were sorting apples at the door of the back shed, one lovely October afternoon. Baldwins, russets, greenings, Swaars, pippins, lay heaped on the little bit of turf, in gay masses of red, gold, and brown; the clumsy cart body, tilted on end, poured out a stream of ruddy fruit, that should have fallen from nothing less picturesque than the horn of Ceres; and far away, over the fennel and cabbages in the garden, over the green sward of the orchard, the wooded hill-sides stretched their bright length on and on, till they were purple in the distance, though, nearer at hand, scarlet and orange maples, imperial crimson oaks, deep yellow birches, and purple dogwood boughs, mixed with dark spires of hemlock and pine, shone jewel-like, even through the smoky air of that hot autumn day. Sorting apples is not bad work, if only you have somebody to talk to; at least, that was my experience though I was but a temporary farmer, and, it may be, more fond of a "crack" than I should have been had I always earned my bread under the fullest force of the curse. Deacon Goodwin was a silent man, except at conference meeting, where he harangued away with a power and glory that used up

all his words for a week to come ; moreover, his soul just now was vexed within him by "them boys," who had tilted all the apples into one heap, and how he was to discern, always and surely, between Baldwins and Spitzenbergs, Roxbury russets and russet sweets, puzzled his eyes and thoughts to the last degree ; so that I, who had the easier task of putting the fair apples, from one heap at a time, into one of a row of clean barrels, that stood, like the oil-jars in the Forty Thieves, ranged against a wall, and throwing the rejected fruit into a huge basket, — I, who had time to talk, could not even extract a gruff "Yes" or "No" from the deacon. I was glad enough to hear Aunt Huldah's ponderous step coming through the shed, and her hearty voice behind me : —

"Father, I want them apples you ain't a-goin' to use, so 's I can make sass to-day. 'Tain't a-goin' to do to put it off any longer, and Kate can't be pestered with it in the middle of her ironin', so I guess I'll have the apples, and buckle to at it myself. Where be they ?"

"Well," replied the deacon, "Thomas has got 'em in the corn-basket, and I don't see jest how he 's goin' to let you hev the basket to pare out on 'n there, when he 's a-usin' of it out here !"

"That 's easy fixed," said aunty, never at a loss. "Thomas, you jest bring my old rocker out of the kitchen, and fetch along the pigs' pail, so I can give 'em their share, and I'll set right down here and do all my chores to once, while you 're doin' yours."

"That 's right, exactly, aunty!" said I, flinging a greening right into the barrel of Peck's Pleasants, in my relief at the prospect of some society. I firmly believe it is not good for man to be alone, in more senses than one!

"Well, I'd as lieves you should, Mis' Good'in," chimed in her "old man." "That feller 's a masterhand to talk, and he 's figgered away a good spell at it, all alone, till I guess he 's about tuckered out, for I can't talk none; them pesky boys have mixed these apples till there ain't no two alike in the hull heap!"

"Why, husband! do tell!" laughed aunty; and I went off for the chair and the pail, according to orders. And while I go, let me take the opportunity to praise Aunt Huldah Goodwin, for she is one of a thousand — if, indeed, there be a thousand of her class left in these days of hyper-civilization, education, agitation, and the angels know what not of progress and the like stuff. Such a real, genial, healthy, hearty woman; such a simple tender, expansive heart; such sturdy sense; such practical judgment, — all with a vein of most unsuspected poetry running through it, that tempered her shrewd insight into men with the loveliest sunshine of charity, and kept her eyes as open to beauty of every nature as her heart was to kindness in all its forms. Not of her lifeful and mirthful kind come the array of moody and melancholy farmers' wives who, year by year, swell the lists of insanity; no monotony of work pressed

upon her steady brain till the fine fibres gave way ; she would have her laugh, as well as her labor, and the health that rounded her ample figure and tinged her somewhat wrinkled cheek with wintry red helped both labor and laughter to endure the long strain of life. She was " Aunt Huldah " to the whole village, and I loved her as well as if she had a better right to the title, and I a better knowledge of her goodness than the brief experience of a summer's rustication under her roof afforded. However, here are the rocker and the pigs' pail.

" Set it right down there, Thomas, alongside of the steps, so 's I can put my feet up and hold the pan even, and put the pail side of me ; now, that 's handy."

Hardly was Aunt Huldah settled in her chair and at work, before she called to her husband in a half whisper : " Deacon ! Deacon Good'in ! ain't that Mr. Masters coming down the lane ? I declare if 'tain't ! " added she, in a louder tone ; and, pushing away pail and pan, she went forward to meet a tall, pale man, who came creeping along past the pickets by the aid of a cane, till suddenly arrested by that cheery voice, —

" I want to know, Mr. Masters, if you 've got out far ? Come in, and set down."

" No, thank you, Mrs. Goodwin," said a somewhat querulous tone. " I must go to Miss Peabody's, to see about the singers for Thanksgiving, and Harriet's waiting there for me, I expect ; so must crawl along."

"Well, I wish you would stop," said Aunt Huldah.

"I wish I could, but I can't. Good-day," answered Mr. Masters; and as he turned away I could see he was blind. Aunt Huldah came back to her seat with a great sigh.

"Poor cretur, how he does miss Love!" said she. I looked up at her rather inquiringly.

"Why, we all do that, don't we, aunty?"

"I declare if you did n't think I meant love with a little *l*! Law, child, I was thinkin' about his wife, she that was Love Brainerd; though it ain't much odds, for if ever anybody was called pretty correct, accordin' to their natur', she was; there was about as much love to her as there was in her name. She beat all that ever I see for livin' other people's lives, and doin' their work, and bearin' their pains. I don't know as she know'd herself whether she was most Achsah Root, or Jim Whitman, or 'Lonzo Masters, or Love Brainerd. I guess she was least of the last."

"Did she live here always? Did you know her long?" said I, eager to betray Aunt Huldah into telling a story, and privately rejoicing over the success of my scheme, as I saw her settle down more comfortably into her chair, and draw up the pan of apples further into her lap.

"Yes, she was born here; she 'n' her mother, the widder Brainerd, lived a piece up the Portland road quite a long spell when Love was small.

I expect it was real lonesome over there nights, though the woods is pretty lively in daytime, what with one wild cretur or 'nother; and there was Tumbling Brook come into the valley close by their house, and Rattlesnake Mountain riz up right behind 'em. But it was a good ways off from folks and meetin', and Miss Brainerd was n't a very high-couraged woman. I guess she had some scary times there, though she lived there because she owned the farm, and it was a good strip of medder land after you got down the hillside where their house was, and the brook kept it wet in the driest of times.

"So Love grew up there. She did n't have no children to be mates for her; she kept tight to her mother's apron string, and if she played in the woods Mis' Brainerd went along, 'cause the child was afraid. Fact is, I guess they both got pretty trembly while old Brainerd lived, for he did have the tremens like anything before he died, and acted more like fury. Well, Love she used to get a little schoolin', and more play; for she was n't a very stubbed child: her cheeks was white, and her wide forehead was most too unnatural lookin'; but she did have a pair of clever eyes, that's a fact. I used to tell her she'd catched 'em of the squirrels, they was so kinder shy and soft; she did n't smile very often, to be sure, but when she did it was real sunshiny; and, take her all in all, she was a pretty, personable child, only she was too scary. They lived up there till Love was twelve year old,

and then Mis' Brainerd she sold the farm and moved into the village jest as 't was growin' up here; for you see there was n't any village here in old times, only two or three houses, — this one where my grandfather used to live, and one at each end of Sykes's bridge, — and they called it South Taunton, 'cause it belonged to the town of Taunton. But nigh about thirty year ago, Squire Smith bought out Sykes's mill privilege and set up a cotton factory, and built houses for his hands, and a brick house for his own, and he wanted to call it Smithville; but Mis' Smith she stuck out for an Injin name: she wanted it called Pontoo-suc, after the river; so they battled it a spell, and it was n't like to be any better than 't was before, when home comes Malviny Smith from York. She always ruled to home, and she would have it called Cranberry, so Cranberry 't was. So, as I was tellin', Mis' Brainerd moved up here, to take boarders, and be more sociable like, and send Love to the 'cademy. My! what apples these be! jest as pithy as punkins, and tasted like pigweed. Father, what do you call these apples?"

"Them!" said the deacon, in no way surprised at the interlude, and meditatively regarding the fruit in question. "Well, them's Good'in apples."

"I declare! it's the poorest thing of the name that ever I see," laughed Aunt Huldah.

"Well, aunty, — about Love?" said I, half impatient and half afraid of losing the story.

"Oh, yes! I guess you're a masterhand for

stories, ain't you? What was I a-tellin' on? Oh, I rec'lect. So Mis' Brainerd she took a house back of Squire Smith's, and Love she went to the 'cademy. There she worked like a beaver; but somehow, from havin' lived always alone, and being naturally fearful and shy, she could n't seem to fellowship with any of her mates; she'd only just study and sing; for she did sing the most like a brown thrasher of anything I know that ain't a bird. However, after she'd been two years there, and was goin' on fifteen, Achsah Root come from Taunton, to board at Mis' Brainerd's and go to school; for Shubael Sykes, that taught the 'cademy, had a great name for learnin', and Achsah's people were well to do, and they meant she should have the best of learnin'. Well, she was real handsome; her eyes, and her hair, and her teeth, was as bright as a new pin, and she had a neat little nose, and color like my pink hollyhock; but she was n't a real pretty girl for all that. She was as proud as a kingbird, and, though she was real smart when she had a mind to be, it was as plain as a pikestaff that she thought first about Achsah Root, and after that, other folks could take their chance. Besides, she was pretty mighty, and I've always noticed that when folks set up their Ebenezer as if 't was n't never goin' to come down for anybody, it don't very often get so much as joggled. The children of this world are wise in their generation, the Scriptor says, and I guess she was one of 'em; so it come about that Love, who had n't

ever had anybody very near to her but her mother, now come right under Achsah's thumb, and why it was, nobody could tell, for never was two people so different.

"But such things come, like rain, on the just and the unjust, and the Lord orders it. Love followed Achsah, for all the world like a spaniel dog; she seemed as if she would breathe for her; she was n't never tired if Achsah liked to walk; she always had time to do little jobs of sewing for her when she got tired or lazy; she walked her feet nigh about off, to get her flowers, or books, or anything she wanted; and if Achsah was sick there was n't no end to the things Love would do for her; she'd set up nights and wait on her days. I've known her bend over the bed-head to brush Achsah's hair, till her own lips was as white as a sheet with pain, for she was n't very sturdy, and it's hard work to stand bent over that way; and I've known her cold nights to be on her knees by the hour, rubbin' Achsah's feet 'cause she was so dreadful nervous she could n't get sleep. Well! you might think Love would ha' got paid in her own coin, for it don't seem reasonable to b'lieve that one cretur could do so much for another and not get some on't back again; but it ain't so ordered in this world. Folks is obliged to love without help, pretty much as the angels do, and they that gets the most gives the least. It ain't that the Scripiter means when it says, 'Give, and it shall be given unto you.' I don't doubt but what Ach-

sah liked Love pretty well, but it was n't in her to love anybody such a sight better 'n herself. She liked to be waited on and cosseted, and jest so long as Love was workin' over her, and doin' for her, Achsah paid her off with pretty looks and words, so 't the color would flush up into Love's pale face, and her eyes would shine, and her soft little lips would tremble and pucker, and then Achsah 'd laugh, and tell her she was 'a dear little goose,' but she never spared her none, for all that. Lovin' some folks is jest like pickin' chestnuts out of the burr, — you keep a-prickin' your fingers all the time, and the more you try and keep on, the more it pricks: some will stick to it till they get the chestnut, and then ten to one it's wormy, — them that sticks to the burr is apt to be.

“ However, loving Achsah so seemed to kind of unlock Love's feelin's for other people; 't was jest like openin' the race to a milldam; it seemed as if she could n't help lovin' everybody, 'specially sick people and children. I've seen her settin' on her mother's steps with half a dozen children all over her, lettin' down her hair, kissin' her eyes, and cheeks, and mouth, ticklin' her throat, and all in such a gale, and all bawlin' after her when she had to go away. Then, when anybody took sick in the village, Love was always on hand, readin' to 'em, or sendin' flowers, or makin' porridge; and all with such pretty kindly ways, it did folks more good to hear her speak than it did to have Mis' Smith or Malviny send wine-jelly or soup; there's

so much in ways. And I don't know but what that verse of Scriptor I was speakin' of along back did come to pass, after all, in a certain kind of a way; for everybody did love Love, only jest them she cared the most for. However, that's gettin' ahead of the story.

"Why, Thomas! there's a real fair apple; a Swaar, too! I guess you're gettin' too much talk. I'd better stop a spell; it's considerable of a chore to work and hear an old woman chatter too."

"Oh, don't stop, Aunt Huldah, don't! I shall be as careful — but I do want the story. I wish I had ever seen Love Brainerd."

"Well, if you want to see her, there's a d'guer'type of her down to Harri't Case's, where she boarded, but it don't favor her much; it's like most all of them pictur's, dreadful black lookin'. To be sure, it's her eyes, and her nose, and her mouth, and her handkerchief pin, and a square collar I give her myself when she was married, — but for all that, 'tain't Love; it has n't got her real, livin', sweet look. I suppose it's like her, for they say the sun don't lie; but I should n't never know it. So about two years after Achsah Root come to Cranberry, her father died, and they found he'd give the farm, out an' out, to her step-mother, and left Achsah only a thousand dollars in the bank and a home forever and always in the old house; but that's a queer way to leave a home to anybody, for how are you goin' to tell

what it means? If Love had it left to her to give anybody, it would have meant house, and board, and fire, and lights, and waitin' on jest like a real home; but Mis' Root made it out different. She malkerlated it meant only Achsah's bed room, and was goin' to charge for board and all that; so Achsah knew she meant to have her pull up stakes and go, for nobody could pay that out of the interest money from a thousand dollars. We was all orry for the child, but she did n't pine none, — he was too proud. Mis' Brainerd got her a place in the factory, and she come to Cranberry for food, boardin' where she always had; so Love was pretty nigh set up. Well, things went on much as they used to for a while, only the next winter Love exper'enced religion and joined the church. It did n't appear as if it made so much change in her as 't would in most folks; but I expect it was more like a growth to the best part of her natur', and a leavin' off whatever there was in contrary to grace, — for it can't be denied she had naturally a high sperit; but now she grew more and more meek, and did n't never fret when her work was the hardest, but she appeared more and more sot upon Achsah, and oneasy enough about her speritual state, for she had n't got no more religion than a poppy-head, as she showed plain enough by and by.

“Long about the springtime, there come a young man from Colebrook, James Whitman by name, — second cousin of my husband's sister-in-law, — to

set up for an overseer in the factory. He boarded at our house, and appeared to be a likely feller enough, — good-lookin' and smart, and with real insinuatın' ways, but he was n't very reliable. Well, Achsah was gone back to Taunton for a spell; her own aunt was weakly, and she'd sent for her to come and stay there with her for company, while her husband was gone out West. So one night I was goin' to Mis' Brainerd's of an errand, and the deacon he had the rheumatiz so bad that James stepped along with me it was so dark, and jest as he got to the door, we heerd Love singin'. I declare it did beat all! I could n't think of nothin' but a brown thrasher on top of a white birch, just singin' because it could n't help it, and thinkin' of nothin' only feelin' the sun, and the piny smells, and the sweet summer wind. James was clean bate. 'Aunt Huldah,' says he, as spry as anything, 'I'll go in and wait for you; I'd jest as lieves.' 'Well,' sez I. I knew too much to say anything more. So we come in, and I made him acquainted with all the folks there was in the keepin'-room, and there was several boarders, but he sot right down 'longside of Love, and chippered away real brisk. 'Twas me that had to wait for him, I tell you! but finally I got up and went, and he had to. After that he found his way alone to Mis' Brainerd's pretty often; and though it did n't all turn out as it oughter, — accordin' as we thought it oughter, at least, — I do think he was about as fond of Love in them days as ever a young feller was of a girl,

without stoppin' to think whether he was in pious earnest to marry her or not. The worst of it all was, that Love was as believin' as she was lovin', — she had n't no kind of guile about her no more 'n a baby; she thought folks meant all they said and all they did, for she was too true and faithful herself ever to mistrust other folks; and she had n't lived long enough to find out the Scrip-ter fact, that all men are liars.

“It was n't strange, neither, when you come to think of it, that she should like Jim Whitman. He was a real likely young man to look at, and he was jest as good as pie to Love; he took her to walk off in the woods; he got her posies, and wintergreens, and red leaves, and all sorts o' fancies; he lent her books, and taught her new hymn-tunes; and, last of all, he got round her the cutest way a man can get round a woman — makin' of her talk religion to him, for he was n't a professor; and he made Love think she was doin' him lots of good, while all the time she, poor, dear, simple little soul, was takin' him deeper and deeper into her feelin's and her prayers, till, before she know'd it, she'd got to love him better even than Achsah.

“Now, folks say it ain't accordin' to natur' for a woman to do so, that it's unfeminine and all that. I want to know if it's any worse in a girl to love a man that gives her every chance to love him, except askin' her in words, than 't is for her to begin traight off the minute he says ‘snip,’ when she as n't had no thoughts of him before? I tell you

I'd give jest as much for such love as I would for a corn-sheller that'll go when you turn the crank, and not before. Love Brainerd was n't no machine; and, if folks would only own it, there ain't no woman worth havin' that ain't like her about them things. It's womenfolks that keep that talk up, 'cause they don't want to own the truth to men; it's enough to marry 'em without havin' 'em jaw at you all the time for likin' 'em before you was asked. Well, folks said all over Cranberry that James and Love was keepin' company; but when they taxed her with it, she turned as red as a beet, and said 't was n't no such thing, — he was a good friend of her'n, and she wished they would n't say no more about it. So, when they see it pestered her, they let it be, and b'lieved it all the more.

“In about six months, Achsah came back to Cranberry, and went to Mis' Brainerd's again; and of course Love was dreadful glad to see her, the more that she had n't never kept one of her thoughts from Achsah; and though she 'd writ as frequent as she could afford to, yet it wasn't like a real talk. So Achsah had heerd enough about Jim Whitman to know what he was, before he come round as usual to spend the evenin'. At first he did n't appear to take to Achsah so much as I was afeard he would, for I knew how much more menfolks think of looks than they do of actions; but somehow, though Love could n't hold a candle to Achsah for beauty, she was really

pleasanter to look at lately, for she 'd got a little mite of red in her cheeks, and her eyes were as soft and bright as them two little ponds be under the Ridge, and her face looked so restful and happy, all the time with a smile comin' and goin', jest as if the clouds blowed over it the way they do on our medder lot of a June day. But Jim was polite to Achsah, and she was pretty mighty to him at first; she was n't never very simple in her ways; she 'd fly round like a woodcock when you 're close onto its nest, so 's to make folks come after her, and what with her good looks, and her wheedlin' ways, and her keepin' off at first, and then lettin' him get a chink, to see into her feelin's as 'twere, she got an even chance with Love in Whitman's idees before three months was gone by.

“ Well ! I see 't was as good as over with Love, but I held my tongue, and Love she did n't see no-thing. She heerd Achsah laugh at him behind his back and before his face, and she tried her best to make him like Achsah, because she loved 'em both ; • but he would n't give in ; he 'd tell her, jest as he told me, when I had a spell of talk with him, that Achsah did n't suit him, — she was too proud and selfish for a woman — he liked her looks and her martness, but he did n't love her near so well as he did Love, and nobody else did.

“ I don't know what did ail Achsah ; she was bound to turn his head, I b'lieve. She acted like a merit, first on and then off, till he was fairly off

the hooks, and finally acted as if he did n't know what he did do when she come near him. After a while, Love began to think some thoughts about it; but she was so good, she took herself to task for thinkin' such things, when they 'd both said so much to the contrary so many times, so she stuck to her text, and spared no pains to set off Achsah to Jim, and him to her, as if some kind of possession was in her to make her own bed in a thorn-bush. At last, natur' was too strong for her, she could n't help but see what was goin' on, and she grow'd thin as a shadder, and pale as a white-ash stick. Everybody said she was in a decline, and she looked it, for certain, but still she kept about, her dear, sweet eyes lookin' as if the tears stood in them all the time, till they got past that, and looked as though they was dreened of all the life, and her lips sot in such a wishful, quiet, helpless kind of a way, I used to get my eyes full a-lookin' at her 'crost the meetin'-house, for I was married to a good husband by that time, and was as happy 'as the day is long, and I had great feelin' for folks that was n't.

“ Well, before long, Achsah Root comes to me, and says she : —

“ ‘ Mis' Goodin', I 'd like to have a little talk with you ! ’

“ ‘ Very well,’ says I, ‘ it's a good time, Achsah, — set right down; my chores is all done up, and husband he's off in the wood-lot.’

“ So, after a little spell, she sets to and asks me

if I know'd anything about Jim Whitman's folks, and whether he was altogether reliable or not. Well, I had n't nothin' to say against him, but I was chokin' to speak my mind to Achsah.

"‘So,’ says I, ‘he *is* going to marry Love Brainerd. I think it ’s time; they’ve kept company so long, and Love is so bound up in him.’

"She did turn real red. ‘Oh, no, Mis’ Good’in!’ says she, ‘you mistake; the truth is, James Whitman offered to me last night, and, as I have n’t any of my own people here, I came to you for a little advice.’

"‘Did you tell Love?’ says I, as soon’s I could speak steady.

"‘No, I have n’t. I thought it was best not to say much about it till it was settled.’

"For once in my life, I did let my sperit take the bit between its teeth and set off. I was as mad as a hornet, and I had to sting. I riz right up from where I set, and flung my knittin’ onto the stand. ‘Achsah Root!’ says I, ‘you’ve done a God-forsaken thing, and I don’t see how you have got the face to tell on’t. There’s Love Brainerd’s spent herself on you like a little dog, and you’ve stepped in and wheedled her out of the only thing she could begrudge you, and broke her heart. I don’t say but what Jim Whitman’s reliable enough for you, — a man that don’t know his own mind is plenty good enough for you to manage, and I wish you may get him! Poor, dear Love!’ So, with that, I fetched a long breath,

for I was like to cry, and though Achsah looked poker and tongs at me, she spoke kind o' humble when I'd done, for I'd told her bare truth for once, and folks that ain't used to it feel sort of stunned when it does perk up in their faces.

“ ‘Well!’ says she, ‘I can’t help Love’s liking him, Mis’ Good’in; if he likes me the best, and I like him, I don’t see as I’ve done any wrong. I don’t want to make him unhappy.’

“ ‘My soul!’ thinks I, ‘I wonder if the cretur is a woman or an iceberg!’ So I spoke out loud: —

“ ‘I’ve said my say, Achsah, and, if you can get round your own feelin’s about right and wrong that way, you can’t get round mine. If ’t was worth battlin’ it out with you, I’d ask you how things looked six months ago, betwixt him and her; but I know you’ve fenced off your lot, so I won’t set no more thistles in it than there is now. I hope the Lord ’ll forgive you, but I can’t feel to yet.’

“ So, with that, she says ‘Good-night!’ and the next day I heerd she was gone to Taunton, and in about six weeks Mis’ Brainerd brought me over a piece of the weddin’ cake, for she had n’t suspected nothin’; she thought Love would n’t never have him, ’cause he was n’t a professor, and Love never laid her troubles on her mother’s shoulders. I could n’t taste that cake, though. I giv’ it to Rover, jest as soon as her back was turned.

“ The next Sunday I see Love was to church, lookin’ as if death was writ on her face; her lips

was set, and her eyes shiny, and she walked home with one of the boarders, talkin' and laughin' too loud for the Sabbath. I couldn't feel to speak with her, because my voice was shaky.

"I heerd she said she was well, but I got her over to my house one afternoon about a week after Achsah had come back and settled down t' other side of the mills, in Whitman's house he'd just built.

"I sent for Love to come and get some yeller gourd-seed, and when she come into the keepin'-room and I got hold of her, I knew by the feel of her hot and dry hand that she was in a slow fever, and I made her own up she was so the biggest part of the time. Well, I see that she was near about heartsick, so I sot down by her, and draw'd her head down onto my shoulder and kissed her. I expect she knew what I meant, for in less 'n a minute she begun to cry, great, hot, slow tears, and then a real thunder-shower, — and I let her. I knew 't would cool her, and she told me afterward them was the first tears she had cried. After a spell she stopped, and lifted up her head as weak as a baby, so I laid her down on the sofa, and got my knittin', and set down by her, and did n't say nothin', but I hummed an old hymn-tune, till I see the steady look comin' back to her eyes; then sez I: 'Love, you set a great deal by children, don't you?'

"'Yes, I do, Mis' Good'in,' says she; 'they 're about all there is worth lovin', I think.'

"'Well,' sez I again, 'Miss Loomis is goin' to

leave the little school ; don't you think you 'd feel better to take it ? It ain't hard work, and there 's singin' to do, and the children all love you ; I guess you could have it over anybody else's head.'

" I see a little gleam a-shinin' over her face.

" ' You 're very good to think of it,' sez she sorrowfully, ' but I don't think the school committee would trust me.'

" ' Yes, they will, though, Love, for I heard Mr. Sykes recommendin' of you to-day. I spoke to him yesterday, though I said I didn't know as you 'd be willin'.'

" So she riz up, and put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and we was good friends from that time forrard, always.

" Miss Loomis was n't to leave for a month or so, and I kep' Love with me all I could. I saw she was gettin' into a poor way ; she didn't believe what anybody said ; she mistrusted everybody's actions, and was as jealous of folks' words and looks as if the whole world was set to work to hate and deceive her. Poor child ! it went to my soul to think how she 'd eat the tree of knowledge, and puckered her mouth all up, and I did feel hard on them that giv' it to her, after all her lovin' ways to them ! However, I knew 't was n't no use to row ag'inst the tide, so I said nothin', but I used to get her to drive me off when the deacon was too busy, over to Scranton, and Poleville, and round the woods, to all the sightly places there is round here ; our old horse was real steady, and I 'd take

the baby, and after a little I would give her the child to hold, sayin' my arms was tired, and I'd drive. (I knew it was better than medicine to her when I see them little pink fingers curled round her'n, and the small face smilin' up into her eyes till she could n't help to smile back again. Sometimes I'd lay it in an oneasy way, so she'd have to lift, and coax, and kiss it, and I knew when she'd got it hugged up to her, and had cooed it half asleep, so's she could n't stir without wakin' t, that she would be content if we was drivin' all lay.

“ So, by help of grace, and her own lovin' heart, and time, and steady work, before she'd kept a quarter's school, I see she was gettin' some of the lines rubbed off her lonesome-lookin' forehead ; and after a year had gone by she'd got to be more like Love Brainerd again than I'd ever thought he would be. However, I mistrusted that she could n't never care for Achsah again, for I could n't, I am sure — but Love was better than I. I don't know now how it first come about, but after while I heerd she was over there now and then, and when Achsah's first baby was took sick Love watched it and nursed it till it wrastled through ; and things looked as if there had n't been no difference between 'em ever. Somehow I was all mazed, and I wanted to know how it was. I knew well enough how Achsah come round : she was lear selfish ; she did n't care for nobody else, so long as all went pretty straight for her pleasure ;

but just so soon as she was in trouble she could be as good and lovin' as you please, and Jim Whitman was another of her sort ; but Love's side on 't puzzled me. So I says to her one day, as she was settin' on my doorstep, with my little Eben in her arms : ' Love,' says I, ' do you care for Achsah Whitman at all now ? '

" ' Yes, I do, Mis' Goodwin,' says Love, lookin' up at me with eyes as clear as Eben's, and as deep as a well. ' I love her dearly. '

" ' As much as ever ? '

" ' Yes, but not as well. I don't respect her, but I love her. I can't help it. '

" ' Well,' says I, clear beat, ' I think that is grace ! '

" ' No, it ain't,' says Love ; ' it is most all nature. I suppose it did help me to forgive her to think how God forgave me, but I loved her before, always. '

" Then there come a soft look into her eyes, and she kind of drooped 'em, and I see a bright little drop on her long eye-winkers, — ' And I love her enough to be glad she is happy, anyway. '

" Thinks I, ' Your mother gev you the right name,' but I said nothin'.

" About this time Alonzo Masters, a young man who 'd taught singin' to Taunton, come over to Cranberry, to set up a school there. He was a pitiful cretur ; for when he was but a babe he took the smallpox, and lost his eyesight for good ; and, besides, he always enjoyed poor health after

that; and now his mother, who 'd always cared for him, had died, and he didn't want to stay to Taunton no more, but come to Mis' Brainerd's to board. There he tried to do for himself, but he made a poor hand at it, and Love, with her kindly, helpful ways, could n't keep from waitin' on him no more 'n a brook can keep from runnin' down hill; besides, she took lessons of him, and he 'd set and listen to her voice as if he was drinkin' it in, till he most forgot to teach her.

"Things went on so for quite a spell; and, as lookers-on see most of the game, I see pretty soon that he was hangin' on to Love for the breath of his life. He was n't never easy away from her. He fretted like a sick baby when she went off to school, and he kept waitin' for her by the door as steady as the hop-vine 'longside of him. One day I come along and stepped in to see Mis' Brainerd; and, finding him alone on the doorsill, I set down for a bit of talk, and just then Achsah Whitman passed, and nodded. She looked real well that lay; and after she got by says I: —

" 'Well, you're real pretty, that's a fact!'

" 'Who?' says he.

" 'Mis' Whitman, — she that jest went past the loor.'

" 'Not anywhere as pretty as Love, though, Mis' Goodwin,' says he, as peart as the primer, and kind of triumphant-like.

" 'Why, Mr. Masters!' says I, 'what makes you say so?'

“ ‘Because I hear Love’s voice, Mis’ Goodwin, and I know she must be lovely, she speaks so.’

“ ‘Well, I declare, you ’re right,’ says I ; but I did pity the poor cretur, for I never thought Love would trust or care for a man again. However, I don’t make nor mar in love-scrapes, — I’d as soon try to help a bird build its nest ; so I left things to Providence, and they got took care of as they generally do.

“ About a month after that, Love come over to my house one night, and she got me out into the stoop, and put her head in my lap, and, says she softly, but very plain : —

“ ‘Mis’ Goodwin, I’m going to marry Mr. Masters.’

“ ‘Why, Love Brainerd !’ says I, ‘you don’t tell me ! My dear child, for mercy’s sakes, do you know what you are a-doin’ ? Do you love him as’ — She broke right in : —

“ ‘I know, I know, but I never shall love anybody that way again ; and I do feel so sorry for him, — he’s sick, and blind, and lonely. I wonder who would ever take care of him, if I should leave him alone ? I feel as if God had sent him to me, and spoken about it.’

“ ‘But, Love, it’s a dreadful thing to get such an idea into your head, if you don’t love him. It ain’t right. You can’t get away if once you marry him, think of that !’

“ ‘I don’t want to get away, dear. : Nobody cares for him but me, and I should make him so

happy. What am I good for but to spend and be spent for somebody? and who needs it more than he?'

"Well, I could n't say no more, — I felt kind of solemn. She was too near like the folks in the Revelations that was clothed in white garments, for me to trouble her thoughts with the wisdom of this world; so I stooped down and kissed her; and, when she went away, I could n't feel to fret over it; for if ever anybody was in the Lord's keepin', I knew she was.

"After a few months they was married, and it come about just as I did n't darst to hope it would. Love was the completest woman that ever I see, and, beginnin' with pity, she was as tender of 'Lonzo as if he'd been a little baby; and it ain't in any real woman's heart, 'specially such a one as Love, to see anything hanging onto her for dear life without learnin' to love it. Beside, she was onely enough before, — she had n't anybody to ove her more 'n all the world put together, — and he see Achsah Whitman flourishin' like a green bay-tree, so's she could n't well help wonderin' why one should be taken and t' other left, and that cross was hard to bear, I expect, though she did n't ever say nothin'. But now she acted for all the world like my scarlet runner that Old Red trod crost one day when the boys left the gate open, and crushed it down into the mud; and there it lay, ind of tuckered out, till one of the feelers got lowed against the pickets, and cotched hold, and

lifted itself up, ring by ring, till the whole fence-post was red with its blows, and covered with the green leaves.

“Love loved him a sight better than ever she did Jim Whitman. He was a better man. His ‘flections had made him pious, and he was nigh about as good as a sick and fretted man can be, and he was n’t never cross to Love nor peevish; he loved her a heap too much to hurt her, anyway. He thought she was most good enough to say his prayers to, and she was n’t never willin’ to be out of his sight. So the Lord rewarded her in this world; for, though most folks did n’t think ‘twas any reward, I knew it was the nearest to heaven to her to be loved so, and to love back again.

“They lived there to Mis’ Brainerd’s twenty year, she bein’ his eyes and life, and he bein’ like her heart, till she took sick, last fall, of a low fever, and died. I was with her the last night, and he too.

“I did wish he could ‘a’ seen those eyes. They looked after him as if the Lord had touched ‘em, so’s they could speak when she couldn’t. She died a-lookin’ at him so, with both her hands in his’n, and he sot there six hours after she was gone to glory, and I guess she went right off.

“Tom, give me some more apples! Where in creation is my silk handkerchief? I declare! I thought I hed done cryin’ for Love Brainerd!”

ODD MISS TODD.

HER father was odd before her. Barzillai Todd was one of those men who crop out from the general level of other people like a boulder from the soft green surface of a meadow.

He had a good farm, but he lived on it as Selkirk lived on his island. It was but half tilled; he never cut the huckleberry bushes or ploughed them up, for he ate little besides the hard yet juicy fruit while they lasted.

Then no persuasion would induce him to sell the woodland which rose all about his lonely brown house. The trees were his congeners; he knew them individually. It was his delight to lie at length under their aerial canopy, and see the golden ecks of sun shine dance athwart their perfect grace and verdure, or to watch for bits of blue sky, sapphire blue, "like the body of heaven in its clearness," revealed by the parting of a wind-swept bough. The light susurrus of stealing breezes made the purest music to his ear, and he loved to watch the thousand quaint insects that inhabited moss and bark, to trace the busy life of anthills, to track beetles on their laborious journeys, or to see how deftly the wren wove her mystic nest, and the strtridge made of her pale eggs an open secret.

He was no farmer, as all Dorset knew. Hay just enough for his two lonely Ayrshire cows was all he cut, and root crops were unknown to his fields; he raised acres of strawberries, and, being a vegetarian, used them all their season, selling the vast surplus for money to buy books; corn he grew in abundance, for meal was a necessity, and waving crops of rye; a long range of beehives gave him honey, and he had a wild theory that honey was the cure-all, and that a man who had honey at hand and ate fruit in its season would live to an indefinite period.

Flowers did not come into his scheme of life, but flowers clustered about his brown house nevertheless, for he married late in life a pretty girl, below him in social position, but so devoted, intelligent, and lovely that in his silent fashion he worshiped her while she lived, and was constant to her memory when she died, leaving him only one solace, a girl of three, and one monument in profuse roses and honeysuckles at his door. Among the other oddities of the man was his absorbing passion for books. He bought every volume he could lay his hands on in days when books cost money.

Especially did he adore Shakespeare, and above almost all his characters he admired the lovely lady of the "Winter's Tale," and therefore, in spite of his wife's gentle remonstrance, their poor child figured in the family annals as Hermione Todd, a "concatenation accordingly" which use and time resented, and few people in Dorset ever knew that

"Miny" Todd had any other name than this dissyllable.

After his wife's death Barzillai Todd lived a stranger life than ever. He hired an old deaf cousin to do his housework, instructing her himself in all the mysteries of rye mush, "whole-flour" bread, suppawn, samp, and other doubtful corn-bread dainties, which were only rendered eatable by lavish supplies of cream and fresh milk. For clothes little Miny depended on Hepsy's tasteless selection and clumsy fingers, and being a plain, dark, shy child, perhaps looked as well in the dull cotton fabrics and Shaker sun-scoops that were her uniform attire as in more dainty and warmer-hued garments. Education she had none, in the ordinary sense of the word: she learned how to read in a desultory way, and made out a cramped handwriting for herself by the time she was twelve years old. But it was another of her father's theories that women ought not to be educated. Nature, however, as nature often does, defied his opinion. Though Miny never went to school or to church, and taught herself to read and write, she found her way to the miscellaneous library that lay heaped on chairs, bureaus, tables, even the floor, everywhere in the old house, except in the kitchen and one sunny corner room reserved by Hepsy for her sewing and rare company. There were, no doubt, good materials for a liberal education, in these books, but, taken at haphazard, they were devoured on principles of natural selec-

tion, and the dry treatises thrown aside as they came uppermost; but the histories, travels, and, most eagerly of all, the biographies, were read over and over till Miny knew them by heart. There were no novels or poems, except Shakespeare, in the whole collection; these Barzillai Todd held in the highest contempt, and it was to the absence of all imaginative fiction, except as it is found more or less in biography, that the girl owed her strong common sense and her sturdy persistence in viewing things and people through its medium.

From her rambles at her father's heels — and she followed him everywhere with the mute fidelity of a dog — she learned to know and love all wild things, and inheriting from her dead mother a real passion for flowers, she soon made a garden for herself on the sunny slope before her windows that would have delighted a botanist; for every flower that sprung of itself in wood or field she transplanted thither, and with the reciprocal affection flowers show to those who love them, they all lived and blossomed.

In this way, like one of her own orchids, Miny Todd grew up to her womanhood. Lovers never came near her, and she had no friends. Dorset people did not offer civilities to her father, because he did not want or need them. Neither he nor Miny had ever been ill in their lives, and when his wife died of sudden congestion of the lungs, he had resented help and sympathy from every one, and shut himself in his lair as a beast of the forest might have done when sharply wounded.

A man in New England who gives no honor to church or school is ostracized at once, and Barzillai Todd's position toward these bulwarks of the state set him quite outside the pale of Dorset society. He did not care for this; he was a lazy, selfish dreamer, without natural energy or acquired industry; a few thousand dollars which his father left him — for he came of a highly respectable and once wealthy New England family — he had had the prudence to invest safely, and this income was enough, with the aid of his strawberry patch, to supply his needs. His luxuries nature purveyed for him, and life lapsed from him as the day died out of heaven, easily and unlamented. He came in tired one day, lay down on the rough chintz-covered sofa, from which he pushed a pile of books, and fell asleep, never to waken.

Miny was thirty years old when this happened, and her father eighty. It was time old Barzy Todd died, Dorset people thought, and a few kindly souls went out to the farm to help at his funeral, for Miny had not a relative in the world.

Miny had inherited her mother's warm feeling, and her biographical studies had awakened in her mind a strong wish to know other people. Her father had but one love in his strange gray life, and when that died, with his wife, his capacity for loving died too; but Miny had a broader nature, and when she found that the income which had supported her father was all her own, she rented the farm to an energetic young man, bought a lit-

the house in Dorset, and moving all her wild flowers to the small green yard in front of her new home, and the white roses and fragrant honeysuckle her mother had planted to either side of the door, she transplanted Hepsy also, with the best of the old furniture, and began at this late hour to make friends and to know the world, — as it wagged in Dorset, at least.

Of course the minister called on her at once, and great was the Reverend Mr. Fry's astonishment to find a real and practical heathen in the very midst of his flock; he hurried home to his study, and brought her immediately a Bible, which she received with gratitude, and set herself to read with the avidity that always possessed her at sight of a fresh book.

It would be incredible to an average sinner, hardened, as one may use the phrase, by continuous preaching and teaching, to hear, could it be described, what an effect this book had upon Miss Todd. The Word, indeed, fell into a good and honest heart, and was received with the simplicity and faith of a child. Mr. Fry, who continued his pastoral calls, was put to his wits' end to understand the mental and moral position of this queer woman.

She was converted, he could not doubt, but the process was so peculiar, so heterodox, that he could not perceive it to be a genuine conversion. She did not suffer from deep sense of sin, for she had not sinned as yet, for want of temptation. Her ex-

perience of life was so strange that her experience of religion was equally unexampled ; but perceiving the one fact that Miny Todd earnestly desired to live according to the precepts of the Bible, and was ready to follow Christ as her leader and king, the deacons of Dorset church, never very rigid in their theology, this being an inland village far removed from the great centres of orthodoxy, consented to let Miss Todd slip easily through her examination, and join the church according to her desire. It was a long time, and the process would be tedious of detail, before Miss Miny understood the people about her or the life they led. She herself was busy always, trying to live up to her profession of religion ; but the rest had something else to do, and put off their spiritual experience till Sunday. There were children, haying, harvesting, and all that sort of thing for her neighbors to live through ; and all the more that she visited the sick, fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, they held themselves excused from such duty. Their gossip grated on her charity of soul, their little meannesses seemed to her unworthy of beings who had an eternity at stake, and her heart raged at the cruelties of domestic life which she could not but see among those about her.

If she had been less candid and simple-minded than she was, she would have turned bitter and scornful ; but she was always ready to learn, to wait, and to love, so that if knowledge saddened, it also strengthened her, and what she deplored she

directly tried to improve. Add to this disposition great plainness of speech, — such plainness as a real child may use and only provoke a smile, while custom and convention forbid it to grown people, — and it may be imagined that at thirty-five Miss Todd, ready for all good works, was yet no favorite in Dorset; and but for the fact that the Dorset and Albany Railroad had bought a hitherto unproductive part of the farm for track and station, and paid a good price for it, and another corner had been sold to a speculator, who fancied he had discovered a mine therein (though he only found a pocket of hematite ore which barely repaid his outlay), — all this making Miny a lady of “means,” as Dorset people say, — she would have been as unpopular as heart could desire. But money appeals to the hearts of all mankind, —

“Age cannot wither it, nor custom stale.”

When Dorset knew that Miss Todd owned thirty thousand dollars besides her fifty-acre farm, it tacitly agreed that she could do and say what she pleased. Probably she would have done so if poverty had been her lot in life, yet she would not have done it with impunity; but her hand sweetened her speech, for it was always full of timely gifts.

Still, even her benevolence did not always offset her honesty. The Reverend Septimus Clark, a fine young clergyman from New York, who was traveling through Vermont, and, stopping at Dor-

set one Sunday, preached for Mr. Fry, will never till his dying day forget his encounter with Miss Miny. He had preached what Mrs. Deacon Norton pronounced "a most be-a-utiful discourse," as full of flowers as a greenhouse, liberally sprinkled with poetry, gently "picked out" with sentiment, and here and there a little natural religion put in, like cloves into a baked ham, more for ornament than use. It was a sermon a pagan or a Brahmin would have admired just as much as Mrs. Deacon Norton, but it stirred the depths of Miss Miny's soul. Her great honest gray eyes darkened, flashed, and at last dimmed with tears as she fixed them on the elegant youth supposed to be preaching the gospel; and when he ceased to discourse, and, pronouncing a graceful benediction, came down from the pulpit, he was surprised to see a short, dark, resolute-looking woman, with a pair of reproachful eyes fixed on him, draw nearer and nearer, and at last plant herself in the middle aisle just in his way.

He stopped, courteously, to let her move aside; but she never stirred, only looked straight at him, and said, "Do you believe the Bible?"

Mr. Clark was still more surprised, but answered civilly, "Certainly I do."

"You believe," she went on, "that all these folks you have been preaching to will be lost eternally if they don't believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?"

The Reverend Septimus stared blankly, yet her "glittering eye" compelled response. "Why, yes, madam: I am orthodox."

“And knowin’ that, knowin’ they will never see you again, ’t is n’t likely, and you have n’t had but one chance to talk to ’em and tell what responsible bein’s they are, you’ve been and talked all this stuff about roses and clouds and brooks and things to dyin’ souls! You poor deluded man, what is the Lord goin’ to say to you in that Day?”

The Reverend Mr. Clark choked; he fairly became faint for a moment, for under his elegance and florality he had a conscience, and a somewhat dormant but living Christian faith; but he was not man enough to say, “Thank you;” he only pushed by Miss Miny, and asked Mr. Fry, who was waiting for him at the door, who the woman was who had stopped him.

“Oh, that is odd Miss Todd,” said Mr. Fry, in such a matter-of-course way that Mr. Clark did not feel it necessary to mention her rebuke. But Miss Miny “builded better than she knew;” the youth never uttered such idle words again; he recognized the situation and accepted it, which is the key of all true life, and became one of the most fervid and spiritual preachers of his sect, though he never saw Miss Todd again.

Deacon Norton, too, winced under her lash, all the more that he was not sure his views of the matter were right. He felt called upon to deal with Miss Todd because she did not attend on weekly prayer-meetings, and paid her a visit for this purpose.

Miss Miny waited calmly till he had delivered his message, and her turn came.

"Look here, deacon," she said with quiet energy, "to begin with, I don't see any special obligation required in Scriptor to have prayer meetings. It says there folks must enter into their closets, and be secret about their praying."

"But what does Scriptor say about two or three gatherin' together?"

"Well, that's another matter; that says if they'll agree about something special to ask. I should b'lieve in that if there was a fever in Dorset, or a drought, or a big flood, or a time of wickedness being peculiar mighty; but you won't never make me believe that 'two or three' means twenty, or that agreeing about a thing to ask for means the broadcast sort of fashion you pray. Why, I did go once, and I was altogether taken down. The first man got up, and instead of praying, he told the Lord the longest string about Dorset people you ever heard, — how bad they were; and then he rambled off about the creation, and the state of the heathen. Deacon, I know that man. I know he's as cross as a tiger to his wife, his boys hide when they see him coming, and he's mean enough to take double toll out of a widow's meal bag. If he stopped reviling his neighbors, and lamentin' over the isles of the South, and tried to example after Jesus Christ, and be a 'livin' epistle,' as Paul says, I think he'd do better. No; I sha'n't come to any more prayer-meetings. I believe in less prayin' and more practicing;" and with a flush on her dark cheek, and a light in

her deep eyes that told how earnest her feeling was on the subject, Miss Miny took up the stocking she was knitting for an idiot boy in the poor-house, and clicked her needles faster than ever.

Deacon Norton uttered a horrified groan, and shook his hoary head ominously as he crossed the threshold; but he was a reflective man, and Miss Miny's ideas stirred a certain reformatory conviction in his mind. He did not thereafter refrain from prayer-meetings, for it had been born and educated into him that they were a necessity of Christian life, but his prayers put on a new style. He was earnest in asking for spiritual gifts rather than in conveying information to his audience; and many an astonished soul discovered for the first time through those fervent petitions that religion is a matter of week-day life rather than Sunday solemnity.

Scandal, too, found little mercy at Miss Miny's door. There was a woman in Dorset who

"Made her enjoyment
And only employment"

in retailing some real or unreal story to somebody's disadvantage. Mrs. Peek was a little woman, with an indefinite sort of mouth, a pale face, and dead black eyes, with a furtive glitter that betrayed a lurking imp hidden in their dark pools. She was a mim, softspoken woman, but guileful and gliding as a snake. Miss Miny never visited her, though they met often at sewing circles, and it was at one of these social occasions that the venomous

little creature began to retail some of her malice to Mrs. Norton, who was sitting sewing at one end of a sheet, with Miss Miny at the other. It was only a version of the old story, — a girl to whom a man had offered marriage, and then changed his mind without giving any reason.

“Well,” said Mrs. Norton, “I think he’d ought to have told her right out like a man, not to sneak off backhanded that way.”

“M-m,” responded Mrs. Peek, with an indescribable soft murmur. “Doo you know, Mis’ Norton, for certain, that he ever did ask Albiny to marry him?”

Mrs. Norton looked at her over her spectacles, with the peculiar glare of that sort of inspection. “I’m as certain of it as though he told me, though I can’t say he did tell me,” she answered sharply.

“Well, m-m, she’s a poor homeless cretur, and I wish her well. I wish her well. But maybe you’ll find out things ain’t jest as you think they is; but I don’t want to say nothin’, — no I don’t want to speak about it.”

“I b’lieve she’s a good girl, Mis’ Peek,” said the deacon’s wife angrily. “I b’lieve every word she says. I don’ know as anybody asked him to make up to her, nor as anybody cares if he doos or doos n’t, but I blame a man for keepin’ company with any gal, an’ then turnin’ square round an’ backin’ down, without no reason nor rhyme to be given.”

“Well, m-m, well, if so be, ’t is so; but I’m free

to say I ain't by no means sure 't he ever *did* say snip to her, so to speak. I wish her well. I hope she 'll marry somebody that 'll make a good home for her, but — well, I don't want to say nothin'."

"What in the world do you keep doing it for, then?" curtly inquired Miss Miny.

An evil flash shot out of the dead black eyes, like flame out of thick smoke; but Mrs. Peek did not or could not answer, and Miss Todd went on: —

"If you wish Albiny Morse well, why do you keep insinuatins' against her? I guess you mistake; you don't like her, and you tell that it's probable — well, that it's likely she's told a lie about that fellow. I don't believe it, and I don't think, Mis' Peek, you remember what Scriptor says about doin' to others as you'd have them do to you. 'T would n't be altogether agreeable, I guess, to have folks say that you 'd asked Mr. Peek to have ye before he 'd ever thought on 't, now would it?"

Mrs. Peek was hit on a sore spot by this pellet; she looked at Miss Miny as if a dagger and a thrust would have interpreted her better than speech.

"I have n't nothin' to say to sech remarks," she murmured unctuously. "No, I don't wish to say no more."

"Don't say it, then; nobody asked you to," stoutly replied Miss Todd. "Least said is soonest mended, 'specially about your neighbors."

"Well, you sot her down consider'ble," said Mrs. Norton, as the small serpent glided away, hissing gently.

"I don't like such talk," was Miss Todd's rejoinder. "I take a lot of interest in other folks's affairs. I can't help it. I have n't got kith nor kin of my own, and I do get to feel as though all Dorset was a sort of a family to me ; and I believe the Lord made folks to be int'rested in other folks, or the world could n't gee, anyhow ; but as for scandal and unfriendly talk, I don't like it. If it's got to be, why speak it out. I never could bear mice because they always run round under things and rustle. It's mean to sneak, and hide, and burrow like that. I've got as much respect again for a man that swears right out as I have for one that keeps hintin'."

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed the horrified listener.

Mrs. Norton had her own private grievances, and they were growing fast. She had but one daughter, a pretty girl of sixteen, whose waving red hair, white skin, blue eyes, and scarlet lips were mightily attractive to the youths of Dorset ; for though Dell Norton had a quick temper, she had a merry wit, and was full of fun and brightness. Her father loved her with all his shut-up heart, and her mother spoiled and scolded her by turns, but if anybody else found fault with Dell she was as ready to fly at them as an old hen whose chickens are profaned by mortal approach.

Now the girl had a girlish fashion of speech which Miss Todd did not like, it seemed to her so near an approach to positive lying ; and she at last

expressed her opinion, as usual, with entire frankness. She had gone into Deacon Norton's of an errand one day, and Dell came hurrying in to ask her mother if she might go to ride with Sam Elderkin, a youth of good report, but a poor farmer, which is next door to being a pauper in New England.

Regardless of poverty, however, Sam had "cast a wistful eye," as the hymn-book says, into Deacon Norton's fold, and Mrs. Norton suspected it. Dell liked him as she liked a dozen others, and her mother was wise enough to say nothing till she should see real occasion.

Dell was all animation to-day.

"Oh, ma! Sam Elderkin's got a new horse; his uncle down to Hartford sent it up to him. My! ain't it a splendid one! Its back's three weeks broad, and it jest goes like a livin' storm. I don't believe lightnin' would more 'n keep up with it. I'd jest like to ride behind it forever. Can't I go over to Wallingford with him?"

Mrs. Norton could say neither yes nor no, for Miss Miny asked so quickly and quietly, "You don't mean what you say, do ye, Adelye?"

"Why don't I?" snapped the girl.

"Why, forever's a long time, and I don't believe even a Hartford horse could go like lightnin'. Seems as if your words was n't needed to be so big, are they?"

Dell sunk down in a chair and stared at this audacious female, but her mother blazed up.

"Look here, Miss Todd. I guess I'm entire capable of bossin' Dell. She suits me, if she don't you. Go put on you bunnet, child, and go 'long. What in the world air you always meddlin' with other folks's business for, Miss Miny? Does it give you real satisfaction?"

"No," said Miss Miny quietly, with no trace of vexation on her homely face. "I don't know as I ought to have said what I did, but I do dislike to hear girls get into such a big way of talk; it seems so disrespectful to facts; and then it uses up words so fast, — makes idle words, seems to me. But I allow, Mrs. Norton, I had better not have spoke. I suppose I do seem to take more than my lawful int'rest in folks that ain't my folks; but you see I grew up in the wilderness, and I have n't got any people of my own, and I have to like them that don't belong to me, and I get to feeling as if they was my own."

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, aghast at the honesty and humility of odd Miss Todd; but Dell rushed out of the bedroom where she had been prinking, threw her arms round Miss Miny, and gave her a hearty hug, exclaiming, —

"You dear old thing! you shall say just what you're a mind to, for you're just as clever as you can be, so there!"

Miss Miny laughed, though her eyes were very lim. Dell's generous young heart had been touched, and thereafter she found her way to the spinster's little house often, and through her confi-

dences in the twilight, or beside the wood fire, Miss Miny discovered before many months that Sam Elderkin was resolved to marry Dell, and she was as determined to marry him; but both the deacon and Mrs. Norton were opposed with equal determination to the match.

"As obstinate as a Norton," was a Dorset proverb; but Miss Miny, unafraid of proverbs, determined to throw herself into the breach, and make things as right and straight as she could. For once she showed a little of the serpent's wisdom. Instinctively she understood, what the adherents of "women's rights" ignore, the fact that a woman can influence a man, or a man a woman, from the very reason of their difference in sex; so instead of going to Mrs. Norton, she cornered the deacon one day in the store, and asked him to step over to her house, and there laid the situation before him.

"'T ain't no use talkin'," he replied. "Sam Elderkin ain't worth a copper to-day over 'n' above his farm, and I ain't goin' to see Dell give over to want nor pestered with a shiftless husband."

"Well, now, Deacon Norton, who do you expect Dell will marry?"

The man looked puzzled, but went on: "Why, I expect she'll come acrost some well-to-do feller some time that'll make her comfortable."

"There ain't anybody in Dorset you want her to take up with?"

"I don't know as there is, and I don't know as there is. On the whole, I guess there ain't."

“Do you mean to send her away?”

“No, marm. I don’t hold to gals goin’ visitin’ round; it sure turns their heads.”

“Well, then, deacon, as sure as you set there, Sam is bound to marry Dell, and she is in the same mind, whether you let ’em or no. Now ain’t it a lot better to give countenance to it than to have all Dorset talking about you and yours, saying hard things about your bein’ a professor, yet so fond of money and so hard on your girl? Have you got any right to fetch reproach on the Church, jest to have your will done in this thing? Sam Elderkin is a good young man as ever was, only he’s poor. Wasn’t Mis’ Norton and you poor when you commenced in life; and are you willing to make Dell real unhappy, and give occasion to the enemy to revile, because you want her to do different from what you did?”

“You’re the peskiest woman I ever see!” roared the deacon, flinging out of the house and banging the door behind him. But he did not shut the truths he had heard inside that door; they rang in his ears wherever he went, followed him, like the frogs of Egypt’s plague, even into his bedchamber, tingled in his brain at every prayer-meeting, and, to use his own phrase, when he came to confession afterward, “Them things you said jest stuck to me like a bunch of burdocks to a dog’s tail. I could n’t neither drop ’em, nor claw ’em off.”

But the result was that in due season Dell Nor-

ton was married properly at her father's house, and the farm Sam Elderkin owned dowered with four grade Alderneys from the Norton herd and a pair of great red oxen. Dell developed into a model wife and mother, and made such butter as Dorset never saw before; and when little hands grasped the old man's rough fingers, and little feet toddled beside him down to the garden gate, Deacon Norton, in his secret heart, felt a thrill of fervent gratitude to odd Miss Todd.

There lived in Dorset a poor widow with one son. Jonas Pringle was always a good boy, — in fact, rather a goody boy, one of the sort that usually boast of being the sons of poor but pious parents. He was lean and pale as a small boy, and seemed merely to draw out like a telescope rather than grow with advancing years. His hair was palely brown, his eyes palely blue, and his thin face and uncertain mouth could not be called lovely even by the extremest maternal partiality. His mother was a wailing female who would have wept for something she had not in the very lap of luxury, and life afforded her abundant grievances. If the sky shone cloudless, she shook her head and called the day “a real weather-breeder;” if it rained, she prognosticated blasted grain, rotted potatoes, floods, land slips, or any other evil she could think of.

Jonas had the hunger for books and education that his unhealthy sort of organization is so apt to foster. The truest kindness would have been to

turn him out on a farm and make him work for his living, where sun and air, keen winds, and fresh earth would have brought life and color into his unwholesome visage, and hearty labor strengthened his flaccid muscles and knit his loose joints. He needed fibre and force, outward growth, and nourishing food. But his weak mother coddled him from babyhood, — kept him close by the stove, and taught him to knit and sew, when he should have been snowballing other boys or skating on Dorset Pond. She fed him on such cake and pie as her poverty of money and skill both allowed, — messes of poor flour, lard, soda, molasses, and allspice; she gave him strong green tea for the consequent headaches these viands surely caused, and tucked him up in bed with hot bricks and doses of herb tea, when boys of his own age, like Sam Elderkin, slept in the garret, with snowdrifts on their homespun blankets.

Miss Miny had only been established in Dorset a few years, and Jonas was a tall sallow youth of eighteen, when one fine day Mrs. Pringle took to her bed, to rise no more. Contradictory as women are, she endured her last illness with cheerful fortitude, and parted from Jonas with a smile, commending him in full faith to the widow's God. Jonas did not appear to suffer as much as would have pleased sympathizing friends. The truth was, his bringing up had necessarily made him selfish, and while he really mourned for his mother, it was more because she had left him to take care of him-

self than for any deep filial love or sense of lost companionship.

It was the greatest comfort he could have, to be taken home by Miss Todd, installed in her comfortable spare room, and made much of, and Dorset people were not greatly surprised when they learned it was Miss Miny's intention to educate Jonas for the ministry, and give him a home. It required some self-denial on Miss Miny's part to do this ; her old servant had died just before Mrs. Pringle, and as yet she had not replaced her. She resolved now to do her own work, and she also bought a knitting machine, and ground out dozens of pairs of worsted stockings, which she sold. Her money had been well invested, but her charities were exhaustive, and she would not discontinue one of them, but did her utmost in the way of work and economy for Jonas's sake, and felt herself repaid when in five years' time he came back a full-fledged minister of the gospel, and preached in the old church of his native village.

He did not at once attempt to settle anywhere. Dorset was pleasant to his soul. He was comfortably housed and fed, and it gave him keen pleasure to walk abroad among those who had looked down on his youthful poverty, and look down on them from his double pinnacle of education and office. Jonas was selfish, crafty, and plausible ; his pale blue eyes were true to their usual index of character, an index that points to self-love and want of genuine honesty ; and when he suggested that his

health was injured by study, and he thought it would be best for him to spend the summer in Dorset and recruit, Miss Miny joyfully fell in with the arrangement.

It is a fixed law of our moral nature that we love those whom we befriend, and odd Miss Todd was not odd enough to evade this constitutional edict. She had spent time, money, and pains on Jonas as freely as if he had been her son, and she loved him with as pure and fervent affection as ever mother felt for her only boy, for in her nature lay that intense maternal feeling which is not given always to the physical mother, — that capacity of devotion, self-sacrifice, and powerful affection that makes a woman most womanly, most happy, yet capable of anguish unspeakable and mourning that will not be comforted. It did not matter to Miss Miny that Jonas was still lank, sallow, pale-haired, and the very conformation and likeness of a solemn prig; that he always spoke with the awful and lugubrious intonation of “the sacred desk.” She did not see in him any distasteful trait or any uncomfortable habit; she enjoyed his intellectual conversation, his reading aloud, his rather obtrusive and outspoken piety. So Jonas basked in the comfort of Miss Miny’s neat bright house all the long summer through, now and then exhorting at prayer-meetings or helping at a funeral just to keep his hand in.

He was not naturally an energetic man; his tastes were studious and dainty, his constitution

frail, and all these combined to make him indolent. As Mrs. Deacon Norton pungently remarked, "He won't never eat smart man's bread: he likes to set on a fence and see folks mow."

As he whiled away the summer, it came into his head how pleasant life would be if one need not work for a living, — not a singular idea, and one that most of us who do work for a living frequently entertain, but with the thought arose a way of escape from this dreaded vista. Why should not he marry Miss Miny? He might perhaps have speculated on becoming her heir, but she had already confided to him that her property had been left to provide a free library and reading-room for the town of Dorset, and her will was in the judge of probate's hands.

It was an objection that she was twenty years older than he, but in New England country towns a woman is frequently some years older than her husband, and Miss Miny had no relatives to object, nor had he.

Once married, it would be easy to persuade her to destroy that will, and he had the acuteness for his own interest common to selfish men, and understood that odd Miss Todd could do an odd thing without provoking the comment of society. He had full faith in his own powers of fascination, as well as in her capacity for deep feeling, and after much consideration resolved to make cautious approaches. He became more devoted in manner; exerted himself to spare her fatigue and trouble;

sighed occasionally, and fixed his eyes on her in a pathetic way ; interspersed his readings with poetry ; put on her shawl with almost an embrace ; and never went out for a stroll without bringing her wild flowers that she loved, or berries from the hills and uplands.

Poor Miss Todd ! in that lone bosom the girl's heart lay sleeping ; no touch of prince's lips had ever disturbed its long sleep, but it was living still, and now with strange and almost painful throbs it began to dream, to stir. She resisted the unwonted trouble as a blind man might resist unknown approach and alien caresses, not knowing how to define the new and vague delight. She prayed fervently that she might not be given to idolatry, for she knew well that Jonas grew dearer to her daily, though she had not yet recognized the divine unrest that was sweeter than any foregone peace ; her heart ached with feeling as we sometimes ache physically with laughter, for it was a pleasant pain. Does the aloe leave its long verdurous quiet and burst into stately bloom with such careless ease as the new-sprung violet blossoms ? Does not some dull pang strike through the bulb that has lain all winter barren and hidden, when it sends upward its odorous spike of heaven-blue bells ?

I do not know whether to weep or smile over this poor tale of genuine if delayed passion ; it certainly is pitiful, yet it cannot help being ludicrous to betray what curious fancies possessed odd Miss Todd at this crisis of her life. No " sudden interposition

of several guardian angels," such as saved dear old Hepzibah's turban from desecration, interfered in her behalf ; she began to wear pink ribbons, which she had never yet indulged in ; and further to set off her dark and dingy skin, bought herself a bright deep green gown ; strove with the patient anguish only a woman knows to build her scant and crinkled hair up in some semblance of prevailing fashions ; and illuminated her decent gray and black Sunday bonnet with a red rose outside and a blue bow inside. Dorset stared with all its eyes, but only laughed at odd Miss Todd. She lived behind her character as behind a shield ; not a human being suspected that these outbursts of color, these shining eyes, this alert step, were not oddities at all, but genuine submissions to nature's commonest law, the law of love.

It occurred to Jonas as the long summer days went on that it would be very pleasant to drive about Dorset, and would give him more opportunity to hold private converse with Miss Miny ; for her house was already like the cave of Adullam : " every one in distress, and every one discontented," came there for help and counsel, and their *tête-à-têtes* were few and brief ; so he borrowed some kind body's old horse and rattling wagon now and again, and drove Miss Todd through winding lanes, fragrant woods, up and down hills from whence the outlook was exquisite ; or they wound along the edge of Dorset Pond, catching the too sweet breath of the white clethra on its shores, the finer odor of

late wild roses, or the delicate perfume of grape blossoms, — all recalling Miss Miny's childhood to her mind and her heart, and putting the wistful girlish look into eyes that so long had gazed sadly on sin and sorrow. But all this took up her time. House-work languished, and she bethought herself of getting some help in her kitchen, when one hot August day Parson Fry stalked in to request aid from her ever-ready benevolence.

He had just received a letter from Mary Spencer, a former resident of Dorset, and distantly related to his wife, written on her death-bed. She had married a Southerner many years ago, a man of wealth, who had been attracted by her great beauty. She was but a poor girl, the tavern-keeper's daughter, and Mr. Spencer had taken her to Carolina, where for a year or two she lived an ideal life, happy as love and luxury can make a girl who has not known either before. Then the war came; her husband lost all his property, was killed in battle, and she returned to Champlin, a small town in Massachusetts, where her father had moved from Dorset, bringing with her a baby girl. There she had lived as before, helping in the tavern work till her child was eighteen years old. Her mother had died long ago, and she herself been wasting for years with slow consumption, when suddenly her father fell dead of apoplexy, and the shock hastened her own end. She had not a relative in the world or a friend to whose care she could leave Eleanor, except Parson Fry, and when he received

her letter she was already dead, and Nora crying her heart out over her mother. Parson Fry was at his wits' end; he had not a spare inch of room in the parsonage. Indeed, if any brother minister happened in, as they are apt to do, Deacon Norton had to lodge him, for the "minister's blessing" was in full force in the parson's abode, ten small children and a baby giving him what Mrs. Norton rather sarcastically called "John Rogers's measure." She had been brought up on the old New England Primer, and the dim crowd that surrounded that martyr at the stake — ten children and one to carry — was present to her memory.

It was of course impossible to take Nora into his own house, so he came to consult with Miss Todd about her disposal, and found that good woman ready and glad to help him; indeed, she regarded it as a direct providence that the girl had been sent to her in time of need. Providence does not always work after our limited prescience, however, but it did prove to be the divinest of providences to Miss Miny that Nora arrived just then, though it wore a dark frown for a long time, and hid its "smiling face."

Eleanor Spencer had lived so long in the tavern at Champlin, and been made so useful in consequence of her mother's failing health, that Miss Miny's housework was mere play to her young strength and older experience. After the old patriarchal fashion of New England, she was made one of the family, and Jonas opened his eyes to their

fullest extent when Nora appeared first at the breakfast-table, having arrived the night before, and already cooked the pink slice of savory ham, set about with milk-white eggs, the puffy biscuit, the spongy flapjacks, and clear coffee that his soul loved. She inherited her mother's beauty, with the coloring of her father's family: a brilliant complexion, great, soft dark eyes, bright hair that waved all over her shapely head and was gathered in coil on coil behind, and a slight and graceful figure, all of which her lilac print dress and spotless apron set off as green leaves do a rose. She was "a vision of delight" indeed, and Miss Miny, honest soul! looked at her with pleasure and admiration.

But as the summer days went on, and Nora became more wonted to her work, she learned to be more deft and nimble, and had many an hour to spend in the keeping-room, busy with her own sewing or Miss Miny's. She, too, listened to the readings and absorbed them into her quick and willing mind; her eyes darkened or shone at the lofty or passionate poetry, and her beautiful dimples danced, her red lips quivered with laughter, at whatever wit or humor lay among Jonas's selections. She was a whole audience in herself, and her attention and appreciation flattered the reader deeply, but her beauty did more potent execution.

For Jonas was young; and here, face to face with him day after day, was a girl beautiful as flesh and blood can be, and as intelligent as beautiful. It was altogether too much. His heart tri-

umphed over his policy ; in the madness of a real passion he was ready to go all lengths of labor and renunciation if Nora were his ; and she began with that sort of hero worship inborn in most girls to look up adoringly at such wonders of education and intellect as his. She had seen hitherto only the commonest class of men, such as frequent a country tavern, and had no measure in her mind by which to test this man's real capacity ; so she stood as ready to receive and respond to his first expression of feeling as a budded rose stands ready waiting for the expanding sun.

It was some time before Miss Miny's unsuspecting nature perceived the open secret that was acting in her quiet house. She was perceptive enough, but it seemed to her inexperience that Jonas was as much bound to prefer her to all other women as if he had sworn an oath of fealty. She was as odd in her ignorance of humanity as in everything else ; a kiss would have been to this singular honesty of hers as sacred as a marriage vow ; incredible as it may seem, she did not imagine it possible for a man to show every lover-like attention to a woman, and then " whistle down the wind " to a prettier face. This sort of thing, common as blades of grass, wore to her simplicity an aspect both tragic and brutal ; dishonesty was an equal crime in her eyes with murder, for she took her ethical standard from the Bible, not from society, and found there no distinction in evil, no grades of sin, — save that awful exception, the sin unpardonable.

Yet before October poured its living dyes along the Dorset hills, odd Miss Todd began to see what no other woman could have so long misunderstood. She felt in her kind and faithful bosom the tortures that have no parallel in this world, — the remorseless tortures of jealousy. She had been all her life at peace with herself. Even Parson Fry had disturbed his soul over her religious experience because she never could truthfully say that she was the chief of sinners. But now she hated herself as earnestly as Calvin could have desired ; for there developed within her such suspicion, such unkindness, something so near akin to hatred, that her prayers were mere utterances of agony, and her Bible a dead letter.

Sleep forsook her, and her daily food grew bitter. It was scarcely a relief to her when Jonas left Dorset to find, if possible, a parish where he was wanted ; for she knew, with the fearful insight of jealousy, why Nora took her daily walk to the post-office, and why the letters she herself received from her boy were so dry and brief. She was too good to be positively unkind to Nora, and the girl was too deep in her bright dream to be troubled by Miss Todd's unusual silence and constrained manner. Her heart would have been shocked to pity — she had a kind heart — to know what a life her companion and friend was enduring.

Before Jonas had been prospecting — if that phrase is allowable — a month, he was engaged to fill the pulpit of a country church in Connecticut

for a year, and with the characteristic imprudence of a man in love, he thought this was enough to warrant his marriage. He argued that one engagement would at least lead to another, and most probably to a settlement; for he had a certain floral eloquence and a "glittering generality" in his sermons that tickled people's ears, and did not disturb their consciences, — two qualifications which always make a clergyman popular. He had not an idea that he had treated Miss Todd in a way she could or should resent. He fell back on the patent fact that he had never asked her to marry him; and it is a general masculine code that up to this Rubicon you may fight or flee, as you like;

So he went back to Dorset in great glee; but his first entrance into the atmosphere of Miss Todd's house warned him of possible explosives. He sobered down his joy, was pleasant and deferential to Miss Miny, and devised private opportunities of speech with Nora; in fact, his final appeal to her, and her acceptance, took place in what he afterward recalled as "that sacred spot in front of the corner grocery."

It was agreed between the lovers that Miss Todd should not at present be taken into their confidence. They had an unacknowledged consciousness of her probable displeasure, so she was left to fight with her grief in that solitude that makes battle so hard, victory so long of coming. She was a reasonable woman ordinarily, but what jealous man or woman is reasonable? It was the

most natural thing in the world that a young fellow like Jonas, ready to marry a plain, positive, odd, and old woman, from motives of policy, should be turned from his intent by the daily presence and contrast of abundant beauty and the divine charm of youth, but Miss Todd resented it in her soul as a real crime. There was nothing for it but to run from this conflict, and she could not run; she had nowhere to go. Fortunately for her, this inward storm disturbed the equilibrium of her strong constitution; she took to her bed, and in the comfortless tossings of a long low fever prayed day and night to die. No one dies, however, when they wish to; she had to submit to Nora's patient and careful nursing; for though the girl was too young to show much strength of character as yet, she was kind, and pitied Miss Miny from the heights of her own vernal joy, as a poor loveless old maid. Fortunately she did not put her feeling into words, but only put off her marriage, and took faithful care of Miss Todd through the long, dreary winter; and when the poor woman crept back to life again, it was to have Jonas's plans and happiness poured into her ears. She had a relapse, of course. People said she had been imprudent; and so she had, but long before her fever, — imprudent with the headlong carelessness of women who let themselves fall into an open pit, from which none can deliver them.

The relapse served one good purpose: it gave the best of reasons why this marriage should not

take place at her house. She hired a nurse from another village, and sent Nora to the parsonage for her wedding ; and when the happy pair came to say good-by, she was too ill to see them. It was a long time before Miss Miny recovered ; but by June she declared herself well, and resumed her lonely life. Yet there was a great change in her, odd as she still was : a deeper, tenderer charity toward women, whom hitherto she had held in a sort of contempt ; now she seemed to have a key to many of their shortcomings, and to sympathize with their pains and follies more than women often do with each other. Even to those whom society holds unpardonable — and in as small a place as Dorset there are such — she extended the very mercy of Christ, and with human love and pity helped Him to redeem them. Toward men she became pitiless and almost fierce. The injustice of their social position for the first time became visible to her eyes, and she resented it with the force of her nature. Whatever good she did was now turned into another channel : she cared no longer for the boys in the factory, but devoted herself to the teaching of the girls in Dorset, sending to Boston for a female teacher, and setting up a private school at her own expense, except the small fees charged for tuition, which went no further than to hire and heat the schoolrooms. Jonas and his wife rarely returned to the town, for Miss Todd never invited them, and Mr. Fry could not. Their first child was named Hermione Todd, but never

lonely woman was mourned and missed as few women are except in their own households.

Mrs. Norton made the one characteristic comment of the day as she looked at the poor shrunken face of the dead: "Well, I never did! of all *things!* Laid out in a night-gownd and put into a pine coffin! She has n't never got over bein' odd Miss Todd."

AN OLD-FASHIONED THANKSGIVING.

"We 'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne, my dear!"

"PILE in, Hannah. Get right down 'long o' the clock, so's to kinder shore it up. I'll fix in them pillers t' other side on't, and you can set back ag'inst the bed. Good-by, folks! Gee up! Bright. Gee! I tell ye, Buck."

"Good-by!" nodded Hannah, from the depths of the old calash which granny had given her for a riding-hood, and her rosy face sparkled under the green shadow like a blossom under a burdock leaf.

This was their wedding journey. Thirty long miles to be traveled, at the slow pace of an ox-cart, where to-day a railroad spins by, and a log hut in the dim distance.

But Hannah did not cry about it. There was a momentary choking, perhaps, in her throat, as she caught a last view of granny's mob-cap and her father's rough face, with the red head of her small step-brother between them, grouped in the doorway. Her mother had died long ago, and there was another in her place now, and a swarm of children. Hannah was going to her own home, to a

profited thereby, and though Jonas hoped to the end he received nothing. She had made a new will, and all her money went to found a female college of the smallest size, eligible for only ten members, and in its rigid rule resembling a nunnery.

For at length she did die, and during her last illness Mr. Fry, in pursuance of his office, had many serious conversations with her. One day he said, "And you feel in charity with all men, Sister Todd?"

"I don't know that," she replied sharply. "I suppose it is n't a duty to forgive folks unless they ask for forgiveness, is 't?"

Parson Fry looked puzzled. "Well," he said meditatively, "I do suppose we ought to keep continually in a forgiving frame."

"That is n't the point. You can't tell me about Scripser. The Lord never forgives folks without they repent. To offer such folks forgiveness would come the nearest of anything I can think of to throwin' pearls before swine; they 'd turn and rend you, surely."

"But you should be ready to forgive sech as do repent and seek pardon," solemnly replied the parson, a little disturbed by her contumacy.

"Well, I hope I am; but there's small chance I shall be asked."

She never was. Though Jonas struggled with poverty, and Nora lost her beauty and grace in the hard life of a poor minister's wife, and her husband repented that he had not married Miss

Todd, it was simply because he hungered for money with the primal instincts of a lazy and selfish man, from whom the brief insanity of passion had long fled, and who pined for the fleshpots of Egypt. That he had wronged her, or hurt her almost to the death, never occurred to him.

Miss Miny shocked the conventions of Dorset even to her last hour, for she extracted a promise solemn as an oath from her nurse with regard to her funeral.

“I want you should put on me a clean night-gownd and cap, Semanthy. I am going to sleep till the Lord comes, and I think it is a waste of good clothes to bury them. I wish to look conformable. Moreover, I want a plain pine coffin, and no plate about it. Money is n’t plenty enough, as long as there’s a poor woman livin’, to make a vain show of it. I don’t expect gown nor coffin to rise no more ’n this miserable old body, and I won’t be answerable for foolish waste of what the Lord gave me.”

After this she laid her cheek on her hand, sighed, and died, quietly as a brown leaf falls from the last tree that holds those tawny ghosts into the edge of winter.

Dorset people all came to her funeral, which was held in the meeting-house, and the universal grief discovered her secret benefactions as the early rains discover seeds long ago sown.

She had done a thousand kindnesses, small but helpful, that were all remembered now, and the

much easier life, and going with John. Why should she cry?

Besides, Hannah was the merriest little woman in the country. She had a laugh always lying ready in a convenient dimple.

She never knew what "blues" meant, except to dye stocking-yarn. She was sunny as a dandelion and gay as a bobolink. Her sweet good-nature never failed through the long day's journey, and when night came she made a pot of tea at the camp-fire, roasted a row of apples, and broiled a partridge John shot by the wayside, with as much enjoyment as if this was the merest picnic excursion, and not a solitary camp in the forest, long miles away from any human dwelling, and by no means sure of safety from some lingering savage, some beast of harmful nature, or at least a visit from a shambling black bear, for bears were plentiful enough in that region.

But none of these things worried Hannah. She ate her supper with hearty appetite, said her prayers with John, and curled down on the feather-bed in the cart, while John heaped on more wood, and, shouldering his musket, went to lengthen the ropes that tethered his oxen, and then mounted guard over the camp. Hannah watched his fine, grave face, as the flickering light illuminated it, for a few minutes, and then slept tranquilly till dawn. And by sunset next day the little party drew up at the door of the log hut they called home.

It looked very pretty to Hannah. She had the

fairy gift, that is so rare among mortals, of seeing beauty in its faintest expression ; and the young grass about the rough stone doorstep, the crimson cones on the great larch-tree behind it, the sunlit panes of the west window, the laugh and sparkle of the brook that ran through the clearing, the blue eyes of the squirrel-caps, that blossomed shyly and daintily beside the stumps of new-felled trees, — all these she saw and delighted in. And when the door was open, the old clock set up, the bed laid on the standing bed-place, and the three chairs and table ranged against the wall, she began her housewifery directly, singing as she went. Before John had put his oxen in the small barn, sheltered the cart and the tools in it, and shaken down hay into the manger, Hannah had made a fire, hung on the kettle, spread up her bed with homespun sheets and blankets and a wonderful cover of white-and-red chintz, set the table with a loaf of bread, a square of yellow butter, a bowl of maple sugar, and a plate of cheese ; and even released the cock and the hen from their uneasy prison in a splint basket, and was feeding them in the little woodshed, when John came in.

His face lit up, as he entered, with that joyful sense of home so instinctive in every true man and woman. He rubbed his hard hands together, and, catching Hannah as she came in at the shed-door, bestowed upon her a resounding kiss.

“ You ’re the most of a little woman I ever see, Hannah, I swan to man.”

Hannah laughed like a swarm of spring black-birds. "I declare, John, you do beat all! Ain't it real pleasant here? Seems to me I never saw things so handy."

Oh, Hannah, what if your prophetic soul could have foreseen the conveniences of this hundred years after! Yet the shelves, the pegs, the cupboard in the corner, the broad shelf above the fire, the great pine chest under the window, and the clumsy settle, all wrought out of pine board by John's patient and skillful fingers, filled all her needs; and what can modern conveniences do more?

So they ate their supper at home for the first time, happy as new-nested birds, and far more grateful.

John had built a sawmill on the brook a little way from the house, and already owned a flourishing trade; for the settlement about the lake from which Nepasset Brook sprung was quite large, and till John Perkins went there the lumber had been all drawn fifteen miles off, to Litchfield, and his mill was only three miles from Nepash village. Hard work and hard fare lay before them both; but they were not daunted by the prospect. Hannah sung over her washtub and her bread-bowl, and found time to fill a "posy bed" with old-fashioned flowers, train a wild grapevine on the south side of the cabin, and run up daily to the mill with dinner to John. But by and by a cradle entered the door, and a baby was laid in it. No more running to

mill. John must come home to dinner or carry his own pail, for the nursling could neither be left nor taken. Hannah sung now to some purpose ; and, since there were no green blinds to the window, no carpets to fade, and no superstition about flies and moths, plenty of sunshine poured in on little Dorothy, and she grew like a blossom.

One baby is well enough in a log cabin, with one room for all the purposes of life ; but when next year brought two more, a pair of stout boys, then John began to saw lumber for his own use. A bedroom was built on the east side of the house, and a rough stairway into the loft, — more room perhaps than was needed ; but John was called in Nepash “a dre’dful forecastin’ man,” and he took warning from the twins. And timely warning it proved, for as the years slipped by, one after another, they left their arrows in his quiver, till ten children bloomed about the hearth. The old cabin had disappeared entirely. A good-sized frame house of one story, with a high-pitched roof, stood in its stead, and a slab fence kept roving animals out of the yard and saved the apple-trees from the teeth of stray cows and horses.

Poor enough they were still. The loom in the garret always had its web ready, the great wheel by the other window sung its busy song year in and year out. Dolly was her mother’s right hand now ; and the twins, Ralph and Reuben, could fire the musket and chop wood. Sylvy, the fourth child, was the odd one. All the rest were sturdy, rosy,

laughing girls and boys; but Sylvy had been a pining baby, and grew up into a slender, elegant creature, with clear gray eyes, limpid as water, but bright as stars, and fringed with long golden lashes the color of her beautiful hair, — locks that were coiled in fold on fold at the back of her fine head, like wreaths of undyed silk, so pale was their yellow lustre. She bloomed among the crowd of red-cheeked, dark-haired lads and lasses, stately and incongruous as a June lily in a bed of tulips. But Sylvy did not stay at home. The parson's lady at Litchfield came to Nepash one Sunday, with her husband, and, seeing Sylvia in the square corner pew, with the rest, was mightily struck by her lovely face, and offered to take her home with her the next week, for the better advantages of schooling. Hannah could not have spared Dolly; but Sylvia was a dreamy, unpractical child, and, though all the dearer for being the solitary lamb of the flock by virtue of her essential difference from the rest, still, for that very reason, it became easier to let her go. Parson Everett was childless, and in two years' time both he and his wife adored the gentle, graceful girl; and she loved them dearly. They could not part with her, and at last adopted her formally as their daughter, with the unwilling consent of John and Hannah. Yet they knew it was greatly "for Sylvy's betterment," as they phrased it; so at last they let her go.

But when Dolly was a sturdy young woman of twenty-five the war-trumpet blew, and John and

the twins heard it effectually. There was a sudden leaving of the plough in the furrow. The planting was set aside for the children to finish, the old musket rubbed up, and, with set lips and resolute eyes, the three men walked away one May morning to join the Nepash company. Hannah kept up her smiling courage through it all. If her heart gave way, nobody knew it but God and John. The boys she encouraged and inspired, and the children were shamed out of their childish tears by mother's bright face and cheery talk.

Then she set them all to work. There was corn to plant, wheat to sow, potatoes to set; flax and wool to spin and weave, for clothes would be needed for all, both absent and stay-at-homes. There was no father to superintend the outdoor work; so Hannah took the field, and marshaled her forces on Nepasset Brook much as the commander-in-chief was doing on a larger scale elsewhere. Eben, the biggest boy, and Joey, who came next him, were to do all the planting; Diana and Sam took on themselves the care of the potato-patch, the fowls, and the cow; Dolly must spin and weave when mother left either the wheel or loom to attend to the general ordering of the forces; while Obed and Betty, the younglings of the flock, were detailed to weed, pick vegetables (such few as were raised in the small garden), gather berries, herbs, nuts, hunt the straying turkeys' nests, and make themselves generally useful. At evening all the girls sewed; the boys mended their shoes, having learned so

much from a traveling cobbler; and the mother taught them all her small stock of schooling would allow. At least, they each knew how to read, and most of them to write, after a very uncertain fashion. As to spelling, nobody knew how to spell in those days. Rank and fashion did not imply orthography. It has even been whispered by the profane and iconoclastic that the great G. W. himself would have been the first to sit down under the superhuman test of a modern spelling-match.

But they did know the four simple rules of arithmetic, and could say the epigrammatic rhymes of the old New England Primer and the sibyllic formulas of the Assembly's Catechism as glibly as the child of to-day repeats "The House that Jack Built."

So the summer went on. The corn tasseled, the wheat-ears filled well, the potatoes hung out rich clusters of their delicate and graceful blossoms, beans straggled half over the garden, the hens did their duty bravely, and the cow produced a heifer calf.

Father and the boys were fighting now, and mother's merry words were more rare, though her bright face still wore its smiling courage. They heard rarely from the army. Now and then a post-rider stopped at the Nepash tavern and brought a few letters or a little news; but this was at long intervals, and women who watched and waited at home without constant mail service and telegraphic flashes, aware that news of disaster, of wounds, of

illness, could only reach them too late to serve or save ; and that to reach the ill or the dying involved a larger and more disastrous journey than the survey of half the world demands now, — these women endured pangs beyond our comprehension, and endured them with a courage and patience that might have furnished forth an army of heroes, that did go far to make heroes of that improvised, ill-conditioned, eager multitude who conquered the trained bands of their oppressors and set their sons “free and equal,” to use their own dubious phraseology, before the face of humanity at large.

By and by winter came on, with all its terrors. By night wolves howled about the lonely house, and sprung back over the palings when Eben went to the door with his musket. Joe hauled wood from the forest on a hand-sled ; and Dolly and Diana took it in through the kitchen window, when the drifts were so high that the woodshed door could not be opened. Besides, all the hens were gathered in there, as well for greater warmth as for convenience in feeding, and the barn was only to be reached with snowshoes and entered by the window above the manger.

Hard times these were. The loom in the garret could not be used, for even fingers would freeze in that atmosphere ; so the thread was wound off, twisted on the great wheel, and knit into stockings, the boys learning to fashion their own, while Hannah knit her anxiety and her hidden heartaches into socks for her soldier-boys and their father.

By another spring the aching and anxiousness were a little dulled, for habit blunts even the keen edge of mortal pain. They had news that summer that Ralph had been severely wounded, but had recovered; that John had gone through a sharp attack of camp-fever; that Reuben was taken prisoner, but escaped by his own wit. Hannah was thankful and grateful beyond expression. Perhaps another woman would have wept and wailed, to think all this had come to pass without her knowledge or her aid; but it was Hannah's way to look at the bright side of things. Sylvia would always remember how once, when she was looking at Mount Tahconic, darkened by a brooding tempest, its crags frowning blackly above the dark forest at its foot and the lurid cloud above its head torn by fierce lances of light, she hid her head in her mother's checked apron, in the helpless terror of an imaginative child; but, instead of being soothed and pitied, mother had only laughed a little gay laugh, and said gently, but merrily: —

“Why, Sylvy, the sun's right on the other side; only you don't see it.”

After that she always thought her mother saw the sun when nobody else could. And in a spiritual sense it was true.

Parson Everett rode over once or twice from Litchfield that next summer, to fetch Sylvia and to administer comfort to Hannah. He was a quaint, prim little gentleman, neat as any wren, but mild-mannered as wrens never are, and in a moderate

way kindly and sympathetic. When the children had haled their lovely sister away to see their rustic possessions, Parson Everett would sit down in a high chair, lay aside his cocked hat, spread his silk pocket-handkerchief over his knees, and prepare to console Hannah.

“Mistress Perkins, these are trying times; trying times. There is a sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees — h-m! Sea and waves roaring of a truth — h-m! h-m! I trust, Mistress Perkins, you submit to the Divine Will with meekness.”

“Well, I don’t know,” replied Hannah, with a queer little twinkle in her eye. “I don’t believe I be as meek as Moses, parson. I should like things fixed different, to speak truth.”

“Dear me! Dear me! — h-m! h-m! My good woman, the Lord reigneth. You must submit; you must submit. You know it is the duty of a vessel of wrath to be broken to pieces, if it glori-fieth the Maker.”

“Well, mebbe ’t is. I don’t know much about that kind o’ vessel. I’ve got to submit because there ain’t anything else to do, as I see. I can’t say it goes easy — not ’n’ be honest; but I try to look on the bright side, and to believe the Lord ’ll take care of my folks better ’n I could, even ef they was here.”

“H-m! h-m! Well,” — stammered the embarrassed parson, completely at his wits’ end with this cheerful theology, — “well, I hope it is grace that sustains you, Mistress Perkins, and not the vain

elation of the natural man. The Lord is in his holy temple ; the earth is his footstool — h-m !” The parson struggled helplessly with a tangle of texts here ; but the right one seemed to fail him, till Hannah audaciously put it in : —

“ Well, you know what it says about takin’ care of sparrers, in the Bible, and how we was more val-erble than they be, a lot. That kind o’ text comes home these times, I tell ye. You fetch a person down to the bed-rock, as Grandsir Penlyn used to say, and then they know where they be. And ef the Lord is reely the Lord of all, I expect He ’ll take care of all ; ’nd I don’t doubt but what He is an’ doos. So I can fetch up on that.”

Parson Everett heaved a deep sigh, put on his cocked hat, and blew his nose ceremonially with the silk handkerchief. Not that he needed to ; but as a sort of shaking off of the dust of responsibility and ending the conversation, which, if it was not heterodox on Hannah’s part, certainly did not seem orthodox to him. Yet he was a good man, and served in the temple with all his placid little heart and neat little brain ; and of him the Master could say, rather than of many a larger nature : “ He did what he could.” Greatest of all eulogies ! However, he did not try to console her any more ; but contented himself with the stiller spirits in his own parish, who had grown up in and after his own fashion.

Another dreadful winter settled down on Nepas-set township. There was food enough in the house and firewood in the shed ; but neither food nor fire

seemed to assuage the terrible cold, and with decreased vitality decreased courage came to all. Hygienics were an unforeseen mystery to people of that day. They did not know that nourishing food is as good for the brain as for the muscles. They lived on potatoes; beets, beans, with now and then a bit of salt pork or beef boiled in the pot with the rest; and their hearts failed, as their flesh did, with this sodden and monotonous diet. One ghastly night Hannah almost despaired. She held secret council with Dolly and Eben, while they inspected the potato-bin and the pork-barrel, as to whether it would not be best for them to break up and find homes elsewhere for the winter. Her father was old and feeble. He would be glad to have her with him, and Betty. The rest were all old enough to "do chores" for their board, and there were many families where help was needed, both in Nepash and Litchfield, since every available man had gone to the war by this time. But while they talked a great scuffling and squawking in the woodhouse attracted the boys up-stairs. Joe seized the tongs and Diana the broomstick. An intruding weasel was pursued and slaughtered; but not till two fowls, fat and fine, had been sacrificed by the invader and the tongs together. The children were all hungry, with the exhaustion of the cold weather, and clamored to have these victims cooked for supper. Nor was Hannah unmoved by the appeal. Her own appetite seconded. The savory stew came just in time. It roused them to new life and spir-

its. Hannah regained courage, wondering how she could have lost heart so far, and said to Dolly, as they washed up the supper-dishes : —

“ I guess we ’ll keep together, Dolly. It ’ll be spring after a while, and we ’ll stick it out together.”

“ I guess I would,” answered Dolly. “ And don’t you b’lieve we should all feel better to kill off them fowls,—all but two or three ? They ’re master hands to eat corn, and it does seem as though that biled hen done us all a sight o’ good to-night. Jest hear them children ! ”

And it certainly was, as Hannah said, “ musical to hear ’em.” Joe had a cornstalk fiddle, and Eben an old singing-book, which Diana read over his shoulder while she kept on knitting her blue sock ; and the three youngsters, — Sam, Obed, and Betty, — with wide mouths and intent eyes, followed Diana’s “ lining out ” of that quaint hymn “ The Old Israelites,” dwelling with special gusto and power on two of the verses : —

“ We are little, ’t is true,
And our numbers are few,
And the sons of old Anak are tall ;
But while I see a track
I will never go back,
But go on at the risk of my all.

“ The way is all new,
As it opens to view,
And behind is the foaming Red Sea ;
So none now need to speak
Of the onions and leeks
Or to talk about garlies to me ! ”

Hannah's face grew brighter still. "We'll stay right here!" she said, adding her voice to the singular old ditty with all her power:—

"What though some in the rear
Preach up terror and fear,
And complain of the trials they meet,
Tho' the giants before
With great fury do roar,
I'm resolved I can never retreat."

And in this spirit, sustained, no doubt, by the occasional chickens, they lived the winter out, till blessed, beneficent spring came again, and brought news, great news, with it. Not from the army, though. There had been a post-rider in Nepash during the January thaw; and he brought short letters only. There was about to be a battle, and there was no time to write more than assurances of health and good hopes for the future. Only once since had news reached them from that quarter. A disabled man from the Nepash company was brought home dying with consumption. Hannah felt almost ashamed to rejoice in the tidings he brought of John's welfare, when she heard his husky voice, saw his worn and ghastly countenance, and watched the suppressed agony in his wife's eyes. The words of thankfulness she wanted to speak would have been so many stabs in that woman's breast. It was only when her eight children rejoiced in the hearing that she dared to be happy. But the other news was from Sylvia. She was promised to the schoolmaster in Litchfield. Only to think of it! Our Sylvy!

Master Loomis had been eager to go to the war; but his mother was a poor bed-ridden woman, dependent on him for support, and all the dignitaries of the town combined in advising and urging him to stay at home, for the sake of their children, as well as his mother. So at home he stayed, and fell into peril of heart, instead of life and limb, under the soft fire of Sylvia's eyes, instead of the enemy's artillery. Parson Everett could not refuse his consent, though he and madam were both loth to give up their sweet daughter. But since she and the youth seemed to be both of one mind about the matter, and he being a godly young man, of decent parentage and in a good way of earning his living, there was no more to be said. They would wait a year before thinking of marriage, both for better acquaintance and on account of the troubled times.

"Mayhap the times will mend, sir," anxiously suggested the schoolmaster to Parson Everett.

"I think not, I think not, Master Loomis. There is a great blackness of darkness in hand, the Philistines be upon us, and there is moving to and fro. Yea, behemoth lifted himself and shaketh his mane — h-m! — ah! h-m! It is not a time for marrying and giving in marriage, for playing on sackbuts and dulcimers — h-m!"

A quiet smile flickered round Master Loomis's mouth as he turned away, solaced by a shy, sweet look from Sylvia's limpid eyes, as he peeped into the keeping-room, where she sat with madam, on his way out. He could afford to wait a year for

such a spring-blossom as that, surely. And wait he did, with commendable patience; comforting his godly soul with the fact that Sylvia was spared meantime the daily tendence and care of a fretful old woman like his mother; for, though Master Loomis was the best of sons, that did not blind him to the fact that the irritability of age and illness were fully developed in his mother, and he alone seemed to have the power of calming her. She liked Sylvia at first; but became frantically jealous of her as soon as she suspected her son's attachment. So the summer rolled away. Hannah and her little flock tilled their small farm and gathered plenteous harvest. Mindful of last year's experience, they raised brood after brood of chickens, and planted extra acres of corn for their feeding, so that when autumn came, with its vivid, splendid days, its keen winds and turbulent skies, the new chicken-yard, which the boys had worked at through the summer, with its wattled fence, its own tiny spring, and lofty covered roosts, swarmed with chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Many a dollar was brought home about Thanksgiving time for the fat fowls sold in Litchfield and Nepash; but dollars soon vanished in buying winter clothes for so many children, or, rather, in buying wool to spin and weave for them. Mahala Green, the village tailoress, came to fashion the garments, and the girls sewed them. Uncouth enough was their aspect; but Fashion did not yet reign in Nepash, and, if they were warm, who cared for elegance?

Not Hannah's rosy, hearty, happy brood. They sang, and whistled, and laughed with a force and freedom that was kin to the birds and squirrels among whom they lived; and Hannah's kindly, cheery face lit up as she heard them, while a half-sigh told that her husband and her soldier boys were still wanting to her perfect contentment.

At last they were all housed snugly for winter. The woodpile was larger than ever before, and all laid up in the shed, beyond which a rough shelter of chinked logs had been put up for the chickens, to which their roosts and nest-boxes, of coarse wicker, boards nailed together, hollow bark from the hemlock logs, even worn-out tin pails, had all been transferred. The cellar had been well banked from the outside, and its darksome cavern held good store of apples, pork, and potatoes. There was dried beef in the stairway, squashes in the cupboard, flour in the pantry, and the great gentle black cow in the barn was a wonderful milker. In three weeks Thanksgiving would come, and even Hannah's brave heart sank as she thought of her absent husband and boys; and their weary faces rose up before her as she numbered over to herself her own causes for thankfulness, as if to say: "Can you keep Thanksgiving without us?" Poor Hannah! She did her best to set these thankless thoughts aside, but almost dreaded the coming festival. One night, as she sat knitting by the fire, a special messenger from Litchfield rode up to the door and brought stirring news. Master Loomis's

mother was dead, and the master himself, seeing there was a new levy of troops, was now going to the war. But before he went there was to be a wedding, and, in the good old fashion, it should be on Thanksgiving Day, and Madam Everett had bidden as many of Sylvy's people to the feast as would come.

There was great excitement as Hannah read aloud the madam's note. The tribe of Perkins shouted for joy; but a sudden chill fell on them when mother spoke.

"Now, children, hush up! I want to speak myself, ef it's a possible thing to git in a word edge-ways. We can't all go, fust and foremost. 'Tain't no ways possible."

"Oh, mother! Why? Oh, do! Not go to Sylvy's wedding?" burst in the "infinite deep chorus" of youngsters.

"No, you can't. There ain't no team in the county big enough to hold ye all, if ye squeeze ever so much. I've got to go, for Sylvy'd be beat out, if mother did n't come. And Dolly's the oldest. She's got a right to go."

Loud protest was made against the right of primogeniture; but mother was firm.

"Says so in the Bible. Leastways, Bible folks always acted so. The first-born, ye know. Dolly's goin', sure. Eben's got to drive; and I must take Obed. He'd be the death of somebody, with his everlastin' mischief, if I left him to home. Mebbe I can squeeze in Betty, to keep him company. Joe

and Sam and Dianner won't be more 'n enough to take care o' the cows, and chickens, and fires, and all. Likewise of each other."

Sam set up a sudden howl at his sentence, and kicked the mongrel yellow puppy, who leaped on him to console him, till that long-suffering beast yelped in concert.

Diana sniffed and snuffled, scrubbed her eyes with her checked apron, and rocked back and forth.

"Now, stop it!" bawled Joe. "For the land's sake, quit all this noise. We can't all on us go; 'n' for my part, I don't want to. We'll hev a weddin' of our own some day!" and here he gave a sly look at Dolly, who seemed to understand it and blushed like an apple-blossom, while Joe went on: "Then we'll all stay to 't, I tell ye, 'nd have a right down old country time."

Mother had to laugh.

"So you shall, Joe, and dance 'Money Musk' all night, if you want to, — same as you did to the corn-huskin'. Now; let's see. Betty, she's got that chintz gown that was your Sunday best, Dolly, — the flowered one, you know, that Dianner outgrewed. We must fix them lawn ruffles into 't; and there's a blue ribbin laid away in my chest o' drawers, that'll tie her hair. It's dreadful lucky we've got new shoes all round: and Obed's coat and breeches is as good as new, ef they be made out of his pa's weddin' suit. That's the good o' good cloth. It'll last most forever. Joe hed 'em

first, then Sam wore 'em quite a spell, and they cut over jest right for Oby. My black paduasoy can be fixed up, I guess. But, my stars! Dolly, what hev you got?"

"Well, mother, you know I hain't got a real good gown. There's the black lutestring petticoat Sylvy fetched me, two years ago; but there ain't any gown to it. We calculated I could wear that linsey jacket to meeting, under my coat; but 't would n't do rightly for a weddin'."

"That's gospel truth. You can't wear that anyhow. You've got to hev somethin'. 'T won't do to go to Sylvy's weddin' in linsey woolsey; but I don't believe there's more'n two hard dollars in the house. There's a few Continentals; but I don't count on them. Joe, you go over to the mill fust thing in the morning and ask Sylvester to lend me his old mare a spell to-morrer, to ride over to Nepash, to the store."

"Why don't ye send Doll?" asked Joe, with a wicked glance at the girl, that set her blushing again.

"Hold your tongue, Joseph, 'n' mind me. It's bedtime now; but I'll wake ye up airly," energetically remarked Hannah. And next day, equipped in cloak and hood, she climbed the old mare's fat sides and jogged off on her errand; and by noon-mark was safe and sound home again, looking a little perplexed, but by no means cast down.

"Well, Dolly," said she, as soon as cloak and hood were laid aside, "there's the beautifulest

piece of chintz over to the store you ever see, — jest enough for a gown. It's kind o' buff-colored ground, flowered all over with roses, — deep red roses, as nateral as life. Squire Dart would n't take no money for 't. He's awful sharp about them new bills. Sez they ain't no more 'n corn-husks. Well, we hain't got a great lot of 'em, so there's less to lose, and some folks will take 'em; but he'll let me have the chintz for 'leven yards o' soldier's cloth, — blue, ye know, like what we sent pa and the boys. And I spent them two silver dollars on a white gauze neck-kercher and a piece of red satin ribbin for ye, for I'm set on that chintz. Now, hurry up 'nd fix the loom right off. The web's ready, then we'll card the wool. I'll lay ye a penny we'll have them 'leven yards wove by Friday. To-day's Tuesday, Thanksgiving comes a Thursday week, an' ef we have the chintz by sundown a Saturday there'll be good store of time for Mahaly Green and you to make it afore Wednesday night. We'll hev a kind of a Thanksgiving, after all. But I wisht your pa" — The sentence ended in Hannah's apron at her eyes, and Dolly looked sober; but in a minute she dimpled and brightened, for the pretty chintz gown was more to her than half a dozen costly French dresses to a girl of to-day. But a little cloud suddenly put out the dimples.

"But, mother, if somebody else should buy it?"

"Oh, they won't. I've fixed that. I promised to fetch the cloth inside of a week, and Squire Dart

laid away the chintz for me till that time. Fetch the wool, Dolly, before you set up the web, so 's I can start."

The wool was carded, spun, washed, and put into the dye-tub, one "run" of yarn that night; and another spun and washed by next day's noon, — for the stuff was to be checked, and black wool needed no dyeing. Swiftly hummed the wheel, merrily flew the shuttle, and the house steamed with inodorous dye; but nobody cared for that, if the cloth could only be finished. And finished it was, — the full measure and a yard over; and on Saturday morning Sylvester's horse was borrowed again, and Hannah came back from the village beaming with pleasure, and bringing besides the chintz a yard of real cushion lace, to trim the ruffles for Dolly's sleeves, for which she had bartered the over yard of cloth and two dozen fresh eggs. Then even busier times set in. Mahala Green had already arrived, for she was dressmaker as well as tailoress, and was sponging and pressing over the black paduasoy that had once been dove-colored and was Hannah's sole piece of wedding finery, handed down from her grandmother's wardrobe at that. A dark green grosgrain petticoat and white lawn ruffles made a sufficiently picturesque attire for Hannah, whose well-silvered hair set off her still sparkling eyes and clear, healthy skin. She appeared in this unwonted finery on Thanksgiving morning to her admiring family, having added a last touch of adornment by a quaint old jet necklace, that glit-

tered on the pure lawn neck-kerchief with as good effect as a chain of diamonds and much more fitness. Betty, in her striped blue-and-white chintz, a clean dimity petticoat, and a blue ribbon round her short brown curls, looked like a cabbage rosebud, — so sturdy and wholesome and rosy that no more delicate symbol suits her.

Obed was dreadful in the old-fashioned costume of coat and breeches, ill-fitting and shiny with wear, and his freckled face and round shock head of tan-colored hair thrown into full relief by a big, square collar of coarse tatten lace, laid out on his shoulders like a barber's towel, and illustrating the great red ears that stood out at right angles above it. But Obed was only a boy. He was not expected to be more than clean and speechless; and, to tell the truth, Eben, being in the hobbledehoy stage of boyhood, — gaunt, awkward, and self-sufficient, — rather surpassed his small brother in unpleasant aspect and manner. But who would look at the boys when Dolly stood beside them, as she did now, tall and slender, with the free grace of an untrammelled figure, her small head erect, her eyes dark and soft as a deer's, neatly clothed feet (not too small for her height) peeping from under the black lutestring petticoat, and her glowing brunette complexion set off by the picturesque buff-and-garnet chintz gown, while her round throat and arms were shaded by delicate gauze and snowy lace, and about her neck lay her mother's gold beads, now and then tangling in the heavy black curls that, tied high on

her head with a garnet ribbon, still dropped in rich luxuriance to her trim waist.

The family approved of Dolly, no doubt, though their phrases of flattery were as homely as heartfelt.

“Orful slick-lookin’, ain’t she?” confided Joe to Eben; while sinful Sam shrieked out: “Land o’ Goshen! ain’t our Dolly smart? Sha’n’t I fetch Sylvester over?”

For which I regret to state Dolly smartly boxed his ears.

But the pung was ready, and Sam’s howls had to die out uncomforted. With many parting charges from Hannah about the fires and the fowls, the cow, the hasty-pudding, already put on for its long boil, and the turkey that hung from a string in front of the fire, and must be watched well, since it was the Thanksgiving dinner, the “weddingers,” as Joe called them, were well packed in with blankets and hot stones and set off on their long drive.

The day was fair and bright, the fields of snow purely dazzling; but the cold was fearful, and, in spite of all their wraps, the keen winds that whistled over those broad hilltops where the road lay seemed to pierce their very bones, and they were heartily glad to draw up, by twelve o’clock, at the door of the parsonage and be set before a blazing fire, and revived with sundry mugs of foaming and steaming flip, made potent with a touch of old peach brandy; for in those ancient days, even in parsonages, the hot poker knew its office and sideboards were not in vain.

There was food also for the exhausted guests, though the refecton was slight and served informally in the kitchen corner, for the ceremonial Thanksgiving dinner was to be deferred till after the wedding. And as soon as all were warmed and refreshed they were ushered into the great parlor, where a Turkey carpet, amber satin curtains, spider-legged chairs and tables, and a vast carved sofa, cushioned also with amber, made a regal and luxurious show in the eyes of our rustic observers.

But when Sylvy came in with the parson, who could look at furniture? Madam Everett had lavished her taste and her money on the lovely creature, as if she were her own daughter; for she was almost as dear to that tender, childless soul. The girl's lustrous gold-brown hair was dressed high upon her head in soft puffs and glittering curls, and a filmy thread-lace scarf pinned across it with pearl-headed pins. Her white satin petticoat showed its rich lustre under a lutestring gown of palest rose, brocaded with silver sprigs and looped with silver ribbon and pink satin roses. Costly lace clung about her neck and arms, long kid gloves covered her little hands and wrists and met the delicate sleeve-ruffles, and about her white throat a great pink topaz clasped a single string of pearls. Hannah could scarce believe her eyes. Was this her Sylvy? — she who even threw Madam Everett, with her velvet dress, powdered hair, and Mechlin laces, quite into the background!

"I did not like it, mammy dear," whispered Sylvy, as she clung round her astonished mother's neck. "I wanted a muslin gown; but madam had laid this by long ago, and I could not thwart or grieve her, she is so very good to me."

"No more you could, Sylvy. The gown is amazing fine, to be sure; but as long as my Sylvy's inside of it I won't gainsay the gown. It ain't a speck too pretty for the wearer, dear." And Hannah gave her another hug. The rest scarce dared to touch that fair face, except Dolly, who threw her arms about her beautiful sister, with little thought of her garments, but a sudden passion of love and regret sending the quick blood to her dark brows and wavy hair in a scarlet glow.

Master Loomis looked on with tender eyes. He felt the usual masculine conviction that nobody loved Sylvy anywhere near as much as he did; but it pleased him to see that she was dear to her family. The parson, however, abruptly put an end to the scene.

"H-m! my dear friends, let us recollect ourselves. There is a time for all things. Yea, earth yieldeth her increase — h-m! The Lord ariseth to shake visibly the earth — ahem! Sylvia, will you stand before the sophy? Master Lummis on the right side. Let us pray."

But even as he spoke the words a great knocking pealed through the house; the brass lion's head on the front door beat a reveille loud and long. The parson paused, and Sylvia grew whiter than

before ; while Decius, the Parson's factotum, a highly respectable old negro (who, with his wife and daughter, sole servants of the house, had stolen in to see the ceremony), ambled out to the vestibule in most undignified haste. There came sounds of dispute, much tramping of boots, rough voices, and quick words ; then a chuckle from Decius, the parlor door burst open, and three bearded, ragged, eager men rushed in upon the little company.

There was a moment's pause of wonder and doubt, then a low cry from Hannah, as she flew into her husband's arms ; and in another second the whole family had closed around the father and brothers, and for once the hardy, stern, reticent New England nature, broken up from its foundations, disclosed its depths of tenderness and fidelity. There were tears, choking sobs, cries of joy. The madam held her laced handkerchief to her eyes, with real need of it ; Master Loomis choked for sympathy, and the parson blew his nose on the ceremonial bandanna like the trumpet of a cavalry charge.

"Let us pray!" said he, in a loud but broken voice ; and, holding fast to the back of the chair, he poured out his soul and theirs before the Lord, with all the fervor and the fluency of real feeling. There was no stumbling over misapplied texts now, no awkward objections in his throat, but only glowing Bible words of thankfulness and praise and joy. And every heart was uplifted and calm as they joined in the Amen.

John's story was quickly told. Their decimated regiment was disbanded, to be reformed of fresh recruits, and a long furlough given to the faithful but exhausted remnant. They had left at once for home, and their shortest route lay through Litchfield. Night was near when they reached the town; but they must needs stop to get one glimpse of Sylvy and tidings from home, for fear lay upon them lest there might be trouble there which they knew not of. So they burst in upon the wedding. But Master Loomis began to look uneasy. Old Dorcas had slipped out, to save the imperiled dinner, and Pokey, the maid (*née* Pocahontas!), could be heard clinking glass and silver and pushing about chairs; but the happy family were still absorbed in each other.

"Mister Everett!" said the madam, with dignity, and the little minister trotted rapturously over to her chair, to receive certain low orders.

"Yes, verily, yes — h-m! A — my friends, we are assembled in this place this evening" —

A sharp look from madam recalled him to the fact that this was not a prayer-meeting.

"A — that is, — yes, of a truth our purpose this afternoon was to" —

"That's so!" energetically put in Captain John. Right about face! Form!" and the three Continentals sprung to their feet and assumed their position, while Sylvy and Master Loomis resumed theirs, a flitting smile in Sylvia's tearful eyes making a very rainbow.

So the ceremony proceeded to the end, and was wound up with a short prayer, concerning which Captain Perkins irreverently remarked to his wife, some days after : —

“ Parson smelt the turkey, sure as shootin’, Hannah. He shortened up so ‘mazin’ quick on that prayer. I tell you I was glad on ‘t. I knew how he felt. I could ha’ ate a wolf myself.”

Then they all moved in to the dinner-table, — a strange group, from Sylvia’s satin and pearls to the ragged fatigue-dress of her father and brothers ; but there was no help for that now, and really it troubled nobody. The shade of anxiety in madam’s eye was caused only by a doubt as to the sufficiency of her supplies for three unexpected and ravenous guests ; but a look at the mighty turkey, the crisp roast pig, the cold ham, the chicken pie, and the piles of smoking vegetables, with a long vista of various pastries, apples, nuts, and pitchers of cider on the buffet, and an inner consciousness of a big Indian pudding, for twenty-four hours simmering in the pot over the fire, reassured her, and perhaps heartened up the parson, for after a long grace he still kept his feet and added, with a kindly smile : —

“ Brethren and friends, you are heartily welcome. Eat and be glad, for seldom hath there been such cause and need to keep a Thanksgiving ! ”

And they all said Amen !

HOPSON'S CHOICE.

"SAY, Josiah, let's get up a fam'ly gatherin', same as other folks do."

"I'd like to see a Hopson gatherin'! Folks would say 't was an ant-hill on a bender, Ozias. We're all too little. 'T won't do to make our shortcomin's public, as you may say."

"Well, I'd rather be little and good than be an Irish giant. I don't never hanker after betweenness. It goes quite a ways to be somethin' nobody else is. Now there's them Schuylers, the grandees over to Newton. They do say — and I guess it's so — that they're always a-talkin' pompious about the 'Schuyler nub,' a kind of a bunion, like, that grows on to the outside of their hands. Why, they think the world on't, because the Schuylers all hev hed it as long as the memory of man endureth not to the contrary. I'd jest as lives be little as hev a nub."

"Do tell! Well, Ozy, folks is folksy, ain't they? Come to think on't, there's a tribe over to Still River they call the Sandy Steeles, all of 'em red-heads. It's pop'lar to call 'em sandy, but you could warm your hands real well, the coldest day in winter, to any crop amongst 'em. Carrots ain't nowhere; it's coals."

"Anyhow, 'Siah, if we are little, we're spry, and that's half the battle. Moreover, there have n't none of us been hanged, nor put into state's-prison, nor yet seen the inside of no jail."

"Not yet," said Josiah.

Ozias turned and looked at him with a twinkle in his deep-set eye.

"Expectin' on 't, be ye?"

Josiah laughed.

"I don't know as I be; but life's chock-full of onexpectedness. There; there's the meetin' bell. Come over to-night, will ye, after sundown. We'll talk this here matter over deliberate then. The idee kinder takes hold of me."

"Yes, I'll drop in. 'Mandy'll be real willin' to get rid of me for a spell. Ye see, Obed's first wife's boy's to home, and it seems as though he was a-thinkin' about sparkin' my girl. I don't know. It's pecooliar, anyway, how quick girls gets to be women-folks. I never sec the beat on 't. Tis snip, snap, so to speak. Makes me think of Priest Hawes's favoright hymn, or one line on 't, hat he used to come down on real sollum:—

'The creturs—look, how old they grow!'

"Hope you don't foller that kotation out en-ire," said Josiah, "next line bein',

'And wait their fiery doom.'"

Ozias looked at him with a face of the demurest un.

"Come along," he said. "'Mandy's feller ain't ne of the Still River Steeles."

Josiah tried to solemnize his face, but barely succeeded, as they entered the church door.

Hop Meadow was a little village in one of our New England States, lying in a tiny green valley shut in by low rolling hills, patched here and there with yellow grainfields, squares of waving grass, or crimson clover fragrant as the breath of Eden; and threaded by a big noisy brook that pursued its joyful way to the great river rolling but a mile or two beyond the valley, yet quite out of sight of its inhabitants. In this fertile and sunny spot, when New England was first settled, Andrew Hopson, yeoman, from Kent, Old England, had staked out his share of land, and built his hut; he had married, shortly after, his second cousin, and in due time a goodly family of ten children gathered about them. Cousins, too, came over and settled beside Andrew, and more distant relatives were gradually persuaded to find homes in the new country; so, partly for the sake of the numerous Hopsons, and partly in memory of the goodly Kentish hopfields which they hoped one day to emulate, the village was called Hop Meadow. It was a peculiarity of the Hopson family that almost without exception its members were small in body. Not a man, for years after their emigration, as for unknown years before it, reached a height of over five feet two; most of them ignored the inches; and here and there a real dwarf carried the family specialty to excess.

But if Nature had given them little bodily pres-

ence, they all had keen wits, humor, good temper, and good principles, — except exceptions.

Josiah and Ozias were Hopsons by name, but there were Browns among the cousinry, and here and there a Hopson girl had married "outside," and brought her tall husband home to Thanksgiving occasionally, half proud and half ashamed of him. There was a tradition in the family that the first Hopson, that Andrew who put up his log hut in the sunny intervale beside Bright Brook, had left Old England quite as much from pique as principle. He had become a Puritan, no doubt from deep conviction, but there was only the parish church for him to worship in, and the old rector was a stanch adherent of Church and King. When Parson Vivyan heard of the emigrating seceders of Leyden he felt afraid that Andrew Hopson might cast in his lot with those fanatics; and having a kindly feeling for the small yeoman, whom he had christened, and hoped to marry, he exhorted him in season and out of season on the folly of such rebellion against King and Church. Andrew resented the interference, for he had neither thought nor talked of leaving his goodly farm; and he grew tired, too, of the parson's one theme of conversation. He evaded him everywhere, and showed all the quick wit of his race in those evasions; like a drop of mercury he departed from under Mr. Vivyan's touch and was off. So that worthy man took unworthy advantage of his position and preached a long sermon on the text,

"The conies are a feeble folk, and dwell in the clefts of the rock," in which discourse he took occasion to set out with humiliating detail what would naturally be the fate of a poor little creature like the cony if it forsook its home and friends in the rocks that sheltered it, and went out to wandering and strife with wolves and foxes.

The natural history was correct, but the application was so pointed, when Parson Vivyan drew out at length the analogy, and portrayed the fate of the man unfitted by nature for wars and hardships who should leave his neighbors and his native land for the sake of a misguided and heretical opinion, that not even the proverbial good-nature of the Hopsons could abide it.

Andrew took fire at once. He made immediate preparation to sell his farm, a hereditary freehold, and having obtained Prudence's consent to follow him when he should have a home prepared for her, he gathered his household goods together and set sail for the New World, where, as he expressed himself to Parson Vivyan, "there be no prelatical priests to vex the soul, nor yet the ungodly kingdom of a carnal king."

That Sunday evening on which our story opens, a bright June moonlight night, Ozias, avoiding the youth who came slowly and slyly to the front door, which stood hospitably open, with evident intent of "sparking," betook himself to Josiah's house, and perfected the plan for a Hopson reunion.

There were many letters to write, for the tribe

had branched far, if sparsely. There were two Browns in Ohio and three Hopsons in Illinois, and then three generations ago a certain Mark Hopson had settled on a stony piece of land in Vermont, to dig and sell iron, and called the village which sprang up about his furnace, Hopyard; but so unfit was the name when that cleft in the hills became strewn with slag-heaps, and overshadowed with black smoke, that a scoffing stranger had said in the tavern one night, "Better call it the Devil's Hopyard, I should say." This ill name had fastened itself firmly on the little cluster of houses, and though the Hopsons themselves swarmed therein, and looked like a troop of gnomes whenever there was a run of iron and they skipped about the moulding beds in the lurid firelight, yet outsiders were shy of settling there, and told quaint stories of the tiny tribe who occupied the land, and delved, smelted, and hauled pig-iron with an energy that seemed to make up for strength.

It was currently reported that in the early days of the Devil's Hopyard a tin-peddler from "below" stumbled on this small village and, trying to catch some of the little people for purposes of exhibition, chased a dozen of them into the bung-hole of an empty barrel, and triumphantly proceeded to stop up the aperture and secure his prize; but while he pounded at the bung the agile creatures made their escape through the spigot-hole, and derided him with shrill laughter and mocking gestures from the top of a barn, whither they had

climbed on a wild grapevine. Peddler or not, there were plenty of Hopsons there now. And then there was Pamela Bunnell in remote parts of Iowa, who had married out of the clan; and Ozias Brown, who had settled in Pennsylvania; and Marinus Hopson, on Cape Cod; and Tertius Hopson, in Quebec; and more, whom time forbids me to chronicle, but who all received an invitation to this Hopson gathering; and almost all meant to come.

Then began a stir in Hop Meadow. There was a big tent to be hired and pitched on the green — an even bit of turf with some fine elms about it, right in front of the church — and there were spare rooms to clean and dust; and the whole tavern was engaged to afford lodgings if private rooms overflowed; and such baking, boiling, stewing, frying, and other culinary performances set in that one would have thought the ten lost tribes of Israel, all in a famished condition, were coming for a month's stay, and needed unlimited pie, cake, poultry, and pickles, — except that there were hams, boiled, roasted, and chopped or sliced for sandwiches, prominent in every house; and hams are pork! In all these preparations nobody was more busied than Prudence Hopson, Widow Polly Hopson's daughter and only child. Bezaleel Hopson, her father, had kept the "store" in Hop Meadow forty years, when he died, and having married late in life, left behind him this little five-year-old daughter, and plenty of "means" to console his

wailing widow, who was an "outsider," and perhaps attracted her fat and jolly husband by her extreme difference from any of his kindred.

Paulina Flower had been pretty in a certain way: long curling yellow hair, limp and flabby even in its trailing ringlets, languishing blue eyes, a white skin, narrow, low forehead, and long chin, seemed to express and adorn her manners and customs with peculiar fitness.

Nobody but the Hopsons would ever have called her Polly; to "her folks" she was "Pawliny," nothing less; but Bezaleel could n't stand three syllables, so he had followed the custom of his race, and tried to make the best of his wife's melancholy while he lived.

"She beats all," said Ozias to Josiah, his cousin and special crony. "I never see a woman who likes to howl so well in my life; she's forever a-spillin' salt-water. She'd oughter keep clus to a pork-barrel, so 's to save brine. I b'lieve she'd set down an' cry to the heavenly gates, ef ever she got there, to think the' wa'n't a fiery chari't sent down to fetch her."

"Well," answered the more slow-minded Josiah, "some folks is made so; nothin' suits 'em, never. Their eggs gets addled second day out, and if they have n't really got a thing to cry for, they'll do it a-puppus. She's one o' them that likes to cry jest as well as you do to larf, Ozy. It ain't real comfortin' to other folks to see 'em, and I will say I've hankered some to give Polly a hidin'; 't would

do her solid good ter have somethin' real to cry for. But you can't tune another man's wife no-how."

"That's so," sadly responded Ozias.

But Prudence — "little Prudy," as everybody called her, borrowing her title from the most utterly delightful children's books ever written — was a thorough Hopson.

When her father died she was but five years old, and though she mourned him heartily and sincerely, it was as children mourn, with brief tears and tender remembrance, but a blessed incompetence of understanding what loss, death, separation, really mean. She saw her mother no more, if no less, tearful; she could not be more doleful and forlorn under any loss than she had been in the daily fashion of her life; and Prudy was as different from Polly as was possible, — a gay, sparkling, happy creature, everybody's pet and darling. If she had lost one father she had twenty uncles and cousins ready to protect and indulge her, and she grew up to womanhood as nearly spoiled as her sweet honest nature would allow. But who ever was proof against those beautiful brown eyes, red and saucy lips, that tossing, wavy, shining hair, never in order, but never anything but exquisite in its dark shadows and golden lights?

Who could resist that coaxing, caressing, beguiling voice, — a voice that could soften with pity and sparkle with mischief? Who did not clamor for the help of those deft and taper fingers that

were always ready and able to do whatever was asked of them? It was Prudy who came to the front now in all the adornments of preparation. She made the long wreaths of ground pine and coral pine for festooning the tent and the church, and fastened them up under knots of goldenrod and bosses of purple aster, for the Hopson gathering was early in September. She arranged the baskets of fruit that adorned the table, so that pink and purple and amber grapes lay heaped together on vine-leaves, and the profusion of green and gold pears was set off with the earliest scarlet foliage of the maple and deep maroon of lingering beet leaves.

She made the wonderful ornaments of stars and roses and architectural devices that would have adorned the countless pies had not the oven baked them out of all shape. And it was Prudy who manufactured the whitest silver cake and the clearest jelly that made contrast of ivory and ruby beside the grosser aliments of cold ham and roast turkey.

Her mother looked on and shook her melancholy head when Prudy dragged that unwilling parent to see what had been done.

"Yes, I dare say; it's pretty, I suppose. But, oh, I can't help a-mournin' to think how that your pa would ha' relished it. This world's a fleetin' show, Prudence. Ef you'd ha' ben through what I have you would n't take no great of int'rest in these triflin' things."

Prndy laughed; her father had been dead a thousand years — to her; and her mother's melancholy moans had no more significance to her than the wind in the spout.

“Well, mammy, they're pretty, anyway, and I expect most of these things will be a fleetin' show when a crowd of hungry Hopsons get hold of 'em. Who's coming to our house to stay? — do you know yet?”

“I should ha' liked to have Pameley Bunnell and her boy, but she was bespoke by Ozias's folks. I used to know her some before I was married, for she married Bunnell when he lived to our place, and while she lived here a spell I come here to visit, and then I see your pa. Oh, I remember of it well, the fust time I see him; 't was to a meetin' of the sons an' daughters of Massachusetts. Josiah he'd put in the paper that 'all who are or were born in Massachusetts is expected to attend th' annoal meetin' in Clark Hall.' You see, Josiah's wife she come from Hingham; and well do I recollect he got up that evenin' and said the 'highest "gaol" of his ambition hed always been to marry a Massachusetts girl.' Some did n't really understand what he meant, but Pameley she said he'd got the wrong word; Josiah's a little mixy, always an' forever was and will be; and your pa he bu'st out laughin' behind me, and I looked round and see him. He had n't no business there, only 't he provided the provisions, and he'd jest fetched in a pot of pickles 't somebody'd forgot, and — Oh!

I've kinder run off from Pamely. Well, I can't hev her: she writ to Ozias for to have her place in his house. I s'pose 't is more cherk up there than 't is to a solitary widder's like me. One that's seen so much 'fiction and is so cast down into the valley of mournin' as I be ain't good company. And jest my luck! — me that never could abide children — they've sent Marinus's people to us — seven small children, and she's weakly. Oh land! how be I to bear it?"

Prudy laughed again; she could n't help it; the idea of seven children secretly delighted her sunshiny soul. What romps they would have! What corn-poppings! — she would rub up the old warming-pan to-day; and there were five kittens in the barn!

Polly did not betray her own secret hopes to her daughter. Like many languid, selfish, sloppy, mournful people, she had a certain cunning or slyness which tended to amuse her, — and sometimes other people, when it did not vex them! She had purposely delayed asking Pamela Bunnell, who was a widow with one son, to her house, lest the son should take a fancy to Prudy.

Mrs. Polly did not intend to lose her girl if she could help it: no servant could or would so neatly curl her lank ringlets, that, threaded with the gray of forty-nine years, still dropped absurdly down her back; nor would any other woman wait on her so handily and cheerfully on the frequent days when she chose to keep her bed, and must be fed with the

daintiest morsels that Prudy knew just how to prepare.

To be sure, Hopson Bunnell, Pamela's boy, was "well spoke of" by such of the clan as had heard of him, and had some property of his own, beside a reversion of the great prairie farm his mother superintended with all the energy and skill a bigger woman could have brought to bear on the premises; but for all this Mrs. Polly cared nothing. Her listless self-absorption would have come between Prudy and the best match possible, so she had never asked Pamela—who expected it of her—to come to her house, but had gently hinted to the Reception Committee of the occasion that she could take a large family if they were mostly children, and could be crowded two or three in a chamber. Prudy had her own intimate friend, of course, in the village, for though there were but few young girls in Hop Meadow, the Hopsons having a way of marrying young, there were a few, and Lizzy Brown was the best and prettiest, next to Prudy,—a sober, steady, discreet maiden, with brown hair and blue eyes, who looked at Prudence as a robin might at an oriole, but did not treat her at all as the one bird treats the other, but held her in all adoration, and served her with earnest affection.

At last the day of the Hopson reunion arrived,—one of those soft, golden, gorgeous days in autumn when the air is quiet, the heavens serene, and the earth steeped in dreams and rainbows; but the Hopsons were not still; not at all. They

swarmed like troops of good-sized fairies through the wide streets, laughing, shaking hands, chattering, singing, full of welcome and cheer, — slight, airy girls; rounder but still tidy matrons, with dolls of babies in their arms; fat little men, laughing and joking with every new-comer, — the only woeful face being Mrs. Polly's; while Prudy, in the daintiest white gown, with a big bunch of red roses at her belt, was threading the crowd everywhere, marshaling the guests to their several lodgings, smiling at every child, coquetting with every old man, and turning a bewitching cold shoulder on the youths who buzzed about her like contending bumble-bees on a Canada thistle, prickliest and most delicate of its tribe.

But one of the race, Pamela's boy, towered far above the rest, to his own disgust and their amusement. Hopson Bunnell was all of six feet in his stockings, powerful, athletic, and handsome, with dark keen eyes, firm lips, a shock of deep brown curls, and a silky beard of darkness that showed well against the cool healthiness of his smooth if sunburned skin.

"I know he's awful tall," said Pamela, deprecatingly, to Ozias, "and I've set my heart on his marryin' one of our folks. Seems as though Providence interfered serious with my plans. The' ain't no girls anywhere near to us, and them that's nearest Hopson don't seem to fellowship; but I never seemed to sense his tallness as I do now, 'mongst the rest of us."

"Well," answered Ozias, "'t ain't always best to make no great of plans about folks's marryin'; they gener'lly do as they darn please about that, I've observed. Providence hes got severial other things to do, I guess, than makin' matches. I'm a freewill Baptist, so fur as that comes in, now I tell ye."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Pamela. "I don't expect to settle nothing, nor I have n't said a word to Hopson, you better believe. I was only speakin' of it to you, Ozy, out of the fullness of my heart, as you may say, accordin' to Scriptor."

"Well, I sha'n't tell; and 'tain't best to put a finger into sech pies. Natur is pecooliar, Pamely; you can't never tell how it 'll work; so I calc'late always to leave out the bung for fear of a bu'st. There 's my 'Mandy, now. Mariar bein' dead ever sence the girl was ten year old, I've been consider'ble pestered what *to* do with her; but fin'lly I *con-*cluded to see 't she read the Bible right along and said her prayers punctooal, and then I let her went. She had her ups an' downs, but she's come up about as good as the average; and now she's got to keepin' company with a pretty clever feller, and she'll be off my mind afore long."

Hopson Bunnell, all unconscious of his mother's wish in his behalf, was meantime enjoying himself mightily; he recovered from his awkwardness very fast, turning the laugh on his kindred in various ways, and dangleing after Prudy like an amiable giant in the toils of a fairy queen. She seemed to

this tall, handsome fellow something daintier than a flower, and more bewitching than a bird ; he never tired of seeing that graceful little figure waiting on the tables, coaxing the old men with dainty morsels, filling the boys with good things, hollow though they were "down to their boots," as she declared, being unused to boys ; or playing with the little girls, who all adored her. But to Hopson himself Prudy was the most malicious elf ! Nobody teased him as she did ; nobody could.

"Cousin Hopson," she said to him, the day after the feast, — for though almost all the rest had gone, a few of the more distant remained to extend a visit they had come so far to make, — "Cousin Hopson, will you please to do something for me?"

"I *guess* I will," alertly answered Hopson, bewitched with the sweet, shy voice.

"Just hand me down one of them stars to put in my hair, will you?" and Prudy vanished with a peal of mocking mirth, echoed by a cackle of fat laughter from Tertius Hopson, the Quebec cousin, a very jolly, rosy, stout old bachelor, looking for all the world like a Sir Toby jug.

"She beats all," said Tertius. "I never see a numbird fuller o' buzz than little Prudy."

Hopson bit his lips. "I'll be even with her," he said to himself ; so that very evening, as some of the clan gathered round a tiny open fire in Dzias's kitchen, rather for companionship than cold, the young farmer said to Prudy: "You oughter to be put to use, Prudy. I'd like to

buy ye for a mantelshelf figure; you're just big enough."

"I ain't for sale," snapped Prudy.

"Why, you'd do first-rate; them things are all the go, and you're the exact size."

So saying, he stooped, and before Prudy knew what had happened, two strong hands grasped her tiny waist, and she was swung up like a feather by those mighty arms, and set on the broad oaken shelf among the flatirons, candlesticks, and other miscellaneous articles thereon; while Hopson, retreating a step, looked her in the face, and a roar of laughter from Tertius, Ozias, 'Mandy, Josiah, and the rest completed her discomfiture. Prudy colored scarlet, her eyes flashed, and one little fist clinched instinctively; the other hand held fast to the shelf.

"Cousin 'Zias, take me down," she called out imperatively.

"Bless your soul, Prudy! I ain't big enough."

"Get a chair."

"Why, folks is settin' on 'em, every one," and Ozias looked round with an air of innocent dismay that renewed the laughter.

"I'll take ye down, Prudy, if you'll say 'please,' like a good baby," calmly remarked Hopson.

Prudy choked. "I'll stay here all night first," she snapped.

"Well, 'tis jest as I said now. You do make about as goodlookin' a figure for a mantel as ever was."

"Take me down!" shrieked Prudy.

But oh, how pretty she was up there! Dresden could not match with her costliest figurines the delicate creature in her china-blue gown (a sudden chill having come after the September heats had made woolen garments comfortable), falling in soft dim folds just to the smallest shoes that ever a Hopson even could wear, her white throat set off by carnation ribbons under the lace frill, and another bow of that tender, vivid color in her waving, shining hair, her eyes sparkling, her red lips apart, and her cheeks rosier than her ribbons. Hopson Bunnell could have looked at her forever, but he did not say so. "Say 'please' now — real pretty," was all he did say, unconsciously drawing nearer to the lovely little creature.

Prudy was quickwitted; she controlled her rage a moment. "W-e-ll" — reluctantly — "I don' know but I'd whisper it, rather 'n stay up here all night."

Luckless man! He drew near to catch the precious whisper, but as he turned his ear, Prudy's hand descended on his brown cheek with a resounding slap that left a print of five little fingers impressed thereon visibly for at least an hour; but alas! in avenging herself Prudy lost her balance, and Hopson caught her and kissed the lovely, indignant face before he really knew what he was doing.

"'A kiss for a blow, always bestow,'" cackled Tertius. And everybody roared again, except Prudy, who dropped to the floor, burst into tears, and fled.

Hopson was really ashamed of himself, but it did seem to him as if his head whirled; a sense of wild bliss ran in all his veins; he knew well that he had taken an unfair advantage of Prudy, but so reckless was his delight that he was not a bit repentant.

However, he had to repent next day. Prudy turned into a perfect snowball whenever he came near her. It took a week of abasement and apologies to put them on the old footing (externally) again. Could he tell, poor fellow, being only a man, how Prudy secretly exulted in the apology she professed to despise? — *i. e.*, “You were so sweet and so pretty, I could n’t help it, Prudy.”

How was he to know that these words rang in her ears like a song of joy day and night, or that in the once still depths of her heart Prudy recognized a sweet perturbation that dated from the second she was held in those powerful arms, close against a manly, throbbing heart?

But nobody could be cross in this clear autumnal weather, with gay leaves beginning to illuminate the woods, daily parties to hunt for gentian blossoms, to gather “wintergreen plums,” to heap up red and golden apples under the orchard boughs, or clamber after fragrant wild grapes on the hill-sides. Hopson grew deeper in love with every new day, and Prudy fought more feebly against the chains that seemed daily to imprison her will and her thoughts. Perhaps the course of true love might for once have run smooth but for that un-

ruly member that spoils most of our plans in this world, and brings to naught the best intentions and the sincerest goodwill. Tertius Hopson still lingered in Hop Meadow, as well as Pamela Bunnell and her son. Tertius was living in Quebec "on his means," as we Yankees phrase it. He had made some money there in trade, and settled down to enjoy it in a sort of selfish fashion that was not natural to his jolly, kindly disposition.

He had never known how close and pleasant are the ties of kindred till now; he seemed at last to have got home; here was the stir, the interest, the sweetness of a daily intercourse hitherto denied him, and it seemed to warm and rejuvenate his life, to quicken his pulses, to brighten his ideas; he loved it; he could not tear himself away; and above all things he loved to "bother" Polly Hopson. Whenever she sighed, he smiled, broad and beaming as the harvest moon; whenever she bewailed herself, he laughed; when she wept, as now and then she did weep over the departed Bezaleel, he would deliberately sit down and sing to her all the queer old songs he had learned in the "old country," as he persisted in calling Quebec, till the Meadow boys learned by heart "The Leather Bot-tel," "The British Grenadiers," "Hunting the Hare," "Lasses and Lads," and sundry other rollicking ditties which once delighted the ears of our forefathers across the water, and have in them still a ringing, hearty smack of country squiredom and rural sports. At first Polly was outraged; her

chin fell half an inch, and her curls frayed out of curliness with the solemn shakes of her head and the dampness of her tears; but she endured from helplessness, and began at last to smile wintrily and forbearingly on the unconquerable jollity of the man whom at first she mildly contemned. It threatened to be the old story of "first endure, then pity, then embrace;" and, as usual, outsiders saw most of the game.

Ozias and Josiah, after their custom, sat in conclave upon the matter. They had just set the cider-mill going, which they owned in common, and perched themselves on a cart-neap, where they could "chirk up the hoss" which revolved with the beam of the press, and yet indulge in that gossip which delighted their souls, combining business with pleasure.

"Say," began Josiah, "have n't you sorter surmised, Ozy, that Tertius favors Hop Meadow for a residin'-place, so to speak?"

"Well, I hev," Ozias answered, "and I should n't be no more 'n surprised ef that he settled down here after a spell; he's lonesome up to Quebec, I expect. There ain't nothin' like your own folks, after all, when you're gettin' along in years; the don't nobody else sorter seem to belong t' ye."

"It does make a sight of difference," replied the moralizing Josiah. "When one's young, and havin' their monsterious days, it don't make no great of difference where they be, nor what they're a-doin' of; but come to git rheumatiz onto a feller,

and hev the grinders cease because they are few, as Scriptor tells, why, you begin to be everlastin' thankful that there 's a house 'n' home for ye, and a woman to cook your vittles."

"That 's so, Josh, and that 's why I 'm a-goin' to hev 'Mandy and her feller settle down along with me when they get married. She 'll hev the farm when

The end o' my nose
An' the tips o' my toes
Is turned up to the roots of the daisies,

as the songbook says; and she might as well stop to hum and look after me as to go further and fare worse. But seems to me kinder as if Tertius was slyin' round Polly, if you 'll b'lieve it."

"Heavens to Betsey!" gasped Josiah. "That old feller?"

"Well, I never see the time, Josh, 't a man was too old to git married, — nor a woman nuther, for that matter. It 's everlastin' queer, surely, for him to take a likin' to Polly. I 'd as lieves hang on to a wet dish-rag as her, when all 's said an' done, but 'many men of many minds,' as the sayin' goes, and if she 's to his'n, why, I don't make nor meddle with 'em. She 's got a good place for to take him into."

"Yes; that 's suthin. He 's got means, I s'pose, but it 's kind o' lonesome to live the way he does up to *Quebec*, a-lodgin', as he calls it, and to be look down with the sarcastic rheumatiz as he was, in' —"

"Land sakes ! what 's that ?" asked Ozias.

"Well, I don't reelly know ; I b'lieve it 's principally confined to one leg, an' starts pretty high up, but that 's what he called it, anyway ; mabbe 't is the English name on't ; but it 's real severe, now I tell ye ; he said it made him holler like a loon."

"Polly can cry for somethin' then," dryly remarked Ozias.

"And I sorter surmise, Ozy, that Pamelys' boy is a-hankerin' after little Prudy."

"Well, I've had my idees sot that way too. He's a clever feller as ever was ; but I should hate to lose little Prudy. Darn the cretur ! ain't there nobody else to Hop Meadow he could set his eyes onto but her ?"

"I'd like to know who else," answered Josiah. "'Mandy's spoke for, as well you know ; and I have heered lately that Lizzy Brown is promised to Marinus's nevy down to Cape Cod ; he's mate to a threemaster, so they tell, and is off on a voyage jest now, so they don't talk on 't, but it's so. Marinus has kep' his mouth shut. He's a kind of a dumb, oyster cretur." (Poor "mixy" Josiah meant "austere.")

"Nat'ral for him to keep his mouth shut," put in Ozias ; "they gener'lly do."

Josiah stared, but serenely went on. "But he did allow 't was so to Aunt Nancy, an' she up an' told my wife, so ye see the' ain't reelly nobody but little Prudy to hev."

“Hobson's choice for him, ain't it? Hullo, young feller! Speak of a donkey 'n' you see an ear, direct;” for here Hopson Bunnell stalked into the cider-mill shed, his handsome face warm with exercise, and his eyes softened and deepened by his unspoken thoughts.

“We was just a-talkin' about you,” exclaimed Josiah.

“And Cousin 'Zias had to call me a donkey. Now is that friendly?” laughed Pamela's boy.

“There's worse critters than donkeys,” blandly answered Ozias; “but I was only a-usin' the term proverbially, as it were, or was, or might be. Fact is, my eyes is gettin' open to your designs, sir, and I was kind of dammin' in a genteel way about your carryin' off little Prudy to Ioway, when she's the one we all set by like our eyes, and I was askin' in a general manner, ef there was n't no other Hopson girl you could have took up with beside her; and Josiah said the' wa'n't—the rest was all bespoke; an' I said 't was Hobson's choice with ye.”

Pamely's boy flushed to his dark curls; his head was lifted as if some proud delight lay on a height that he could see, but no other, and his voice rang out in subdued yet clear cadence as he answered:—

“There is n't another girl, outside of Hop Meadow neither, Ozias; there ain't in the world. There's nobody for me but little Prudy. You was right one way; she's Hopson's choice, and no other.”

Unlucky mother-tongue! why are *b* and *p* so

near alike in our queer old language that the distinction between them is almost inexpressible by human lips? As luck would have it Prudy and Lizzy Brown had privately stolen up to the cider-press, thinking it deserted, to indulge in the surreptitious but dear delight of sucking sweet new cider through a straw. They were old and demure enough to be ashamed of the trick if any one saw them, but the rich fruity beverage was delicious to their girlish memories, and slyly they stole out to indulge in the tippie, carrying gold-bright straws in their hands, and came up behind the shed just in time to hear Hopson's declaration.

Prudy's face flamed, the tender visions that had dwelt in her dumb heart and softened her cool brown eyes were struck by the lurid light of sudden fury, and fled away; she grasped Lizzy's arm with a viselike grip.

"Come right away," she whispered; and fleet as a silent pair of goblins they left the green yard where the shed stood, and disappeared down a narrow lane that led to Josiah's barn.

Prudy rushed into that friendly shelter, banged the door behind her, relaxed her hold of Lizzy, and sitting down promptly on a wheelbarrow, cried with rage.

"Why Prudy," said the gentle Elizabeth, "what in the world's the matter?"

"Did n't you he-he-hear him? — the awful, horrid, mean thing," sobbed Prudy.

"Hear who, dear?"

“Why, that great, horrid Hopson Bunnell. Did n’t you hear him — I ’m sure he spoke out loud enough — say that he ’d got to marry me: ’t was Hobson’s choice and no other?”

Prudy did extend the facts a little, it is true; she did n’t mean to l — extend them, but she gave the idea as she took it in, just as the rest of us poor mortals do, without a thought that any other construction than her own could be put upon the words, or that she had confounded those confounded letters, — forgive the phrase, dear reader; they continually exasperate me, — *b* and *p*.

“No, I did n’t hear him,” condoled Lizzy. “Poor dear Prudy, did he say such a mean thing? Well, never mind, dear, that don’t make it so; you know you have n’t got to take him. You don’t like him.”

Prudy reared her dishevelled little head from the side of the wheelbarrow, like a snake about to strike.

“You goose!” she said. I *do* like him. Oh dear! oh dear! Lizzy Brown, I’ll kill you if you ever tell. But I do. I can’t help it, and, oh! — and — and I thought he liked me first, or I never — oh! — oh!” —

Here a flood of tears literally drowned her voice, and in Lizzy’s soft eyes tears shone with sympathetic brightness. She sat down by Prudy, and began to sob too.

“And he — oh, Liz! — he kissed me once, and now he says ’t was Hobson’s choice. I ’d just like to shoot him.”

Prudy started suddenly, and the wheelbarrow, overloaded with grief and girls, as suddenly tipped over, leaving girls and grief in a heap on the barn floor. This was too much for Prudy. Blinded with hayseed, damp with tears, choked with hysteric laughter, it was a good hour before Lizzy could calm her or restore her to her proper aspect, and make her consent to go home quietly, though with burning vengeance in her heart.

Poor Hopson! the world was hollow now, and his doll stuffed with bran. If he did n't want to go into a convent, he did want to go back to Iowa, and yet Prudy controlled him like a Fate, and kept him miserable, abject, and longing in Hop Meadow, growing thin, pale, and silent, after the approved hang-dog fashion of unhappy lovers who are tacitly allowed to flaunt their wretchedness all abroad, — probably because it is so transitory.

Polly sighed and wept. Tertius laughed and sang more than ever. Changeful as the aptest specimen of her sex, Polly now earnestly desired that Prudy should marry and leave her to Tertius, for Polly had at last consented to try another Hopson — “try” in more senses than one — and much she feared that Prudy would send “Pamely's boy” home in despair.

Pamela, too, was distressed to the heart with her boy's misery. She dared not try to console him, for on her feeblest attempt to break the ice he would turn on his heel and leave her. At last she brought her trouble to Ozias, with whom she had

been brought up, and whom she regarded as a brother.

"Say, Ozy, what *do* you suppose ails Hopson? He don't never eat a meal of vittles; jest picks a mouthful, as you may see, not enough for a chippin'-bird. And he's a-grievin' in'ardly the whole time; I know he is, for he don't sleep nights, and he ain't no fatter 'n a hen's forehead. He's wastin' away, dyin' by inches, I do believe."

"Well, Pamily, he'll be quite a spell dyin', then, if that's a comfort to ye: there's considerable many inches *to* Hopson."

"Oh-zias, I b'lieve you 'd laugh ef I was a-dyin'!" indignantly snapped Pamela.

"Mabbe I should. I don't love to cry before folks; but really now, Pamily, I b'lieve what ails Hopson is that little witch of a Prudy; he's most amazin' sot on her, and she won't so much as look at him. I 'm free to confess I thought she liked him for a spell; but, Lord! what can a feller find out about women-folks? They 're spryer, an' cuter, an' sinfuler, an' more pernickity 'n a fire-hang-bird! I don't see into it."

"Oh dear! what shall I do?" sighed Pamela, despairingly.

"Don't do nothin'! I'll see to it. It's one of them cases where somebody's got to speak in meetin', and when there's a woman to pay, it's a sight better to ketch a-holt of her with a strong hand, same as I used ter squeeze grasshoppers when I was a boy, and hold her still till she tells.

I'll tackle Miss Prudy myself, for the thing's got to be did; this hangin' on by the eyelids ain't nateral nor pleasin'. You keep still." Pamela was used to the masterful ways of Ozias, so she took to her rocker and her knitting, wiped a few mild tears from her kind old eyes, and waited for events.

Ozias, well aware of Prudy's haunts, followed the path by the side of Bright Brook down to a cluster of shagbark walnut-trees on a meadow that belonged to Bezaleel's farm; he knew she had gone there nutting, and meeting the doleful Hopson on his way, remarked, curtly, "Young feller, I want you should happen down this road in twenty minutes: don't make it longer."

Hopson stared.

"Come, now; do as I tell you: you'll be glad on 't."

"I'll come if you want me," was the listless answer.

Ozias found Prudy doing anything but nutting; her basket was on the ground empty, all about her lay husks and nuts that the keen wind of November had thrown down, but she left them to lie there. Her shawl was drawn over her head, her head leaned against a mighty tree, and she was crying fast and silently, when Ozias jumped over the fence. She tried to tie on her hat, but Ozias sat down beside her and took her two hands fast in his.

"Prudy," he said, "I've got a word to say to

ye: why on the face of the airth *air* you treatin' Pameley's boy the way you be?"

"I ain't," said Prudy, irrelevantly and femininely.

Ozias went on, regardless of her futile remark: "He 's a-actin' like a born fool, jest because you won't not so much as look at him. He thinks the sun rises an' sets in your face, an' " —

"He don't either," broke in Prudy, "an' you know he don't."

"I know he does. He don't nyther eat nor sleep for thinkin' of ye. The great strong, hulkin' feller acts like a sick chicken. Now what 's to pay?"

"Hm!" sniffed Prudy, her color rising and her eyes flashing. "I guess he's found out I ain't Hobson's choice for him, not noway."

"Whew!" whistled Ozias. "Who told you he thought you was?"

"Nobody. I heard him say so — and you was sittin' by and heard him too — in the cider-mill shed, that time" —

"Well, if ever I did!" and Ozias laughed till the woods about them rang again. Prudy grew furious. Ozias stopped when he heard her angry sobs, and called out, "Hopson Bunnell, step over that air five-rail fence, and come here."

Prudy struggled to escape, but Ozias held her tight. He had reckoned well on Hopson's over-punctuality, and the tall fellow vaulted over the rails at his call.

“ Say, Prudy here was behind the shed that day me an’ Josiah was a-pesterin’ you about sparkin’ of her. Now you tell what you said.”

“ I? I was sort of riled at your sayin’ that she was Hobson’s choice, and I spoke up and said ’twa’n’t so ; she was Hopson’s choice. And so she is, and will be forevermore, whether she cares a cent about it or not.”

At the strong ring of that voice Prudy felt her very heart thrill, and Ozias, with preternatural wisdom, let go her hands, as he said : “ I ’ve always heered that two was company and three was none, and I ’m a-goin’ to put the hearsay into exper’ence direckly ; but it ’s also a fact that two is better witness than one, and I hereby say and *declare*, a-holdin’ up my right hand to wit, that this here mortal long Bunnell feller did say jest what he says he said, that the aforesaid Prudy was, out of all Hop Medder, and the hull creation besides, Hopson’s choice. And I swan to man I b’lieve she is ! ” he added, looking abroad at the shagbarks as he saw Prudy run into Hopson’s arms, and kindly left the two to their own company, whistling as he went, but not for want of thought.

CLARY'S TRIAL.

“COME! hurry up there!”

In answer to the coarse, strong voice of Goody Jakeway, who kept the Blisset tavern, her hand-maiden came from the kitchen into the parlor with a mug of hot flip for the traveler who had just alighted.

It was not strange that Guy Morgan forgot his comforting cup as he looked at the bearer. Clary was only a bound girl, but nature had made her an aristocrat outwardly and inwardly, as the proud lift of her beautiful head, the serene calm of her great brown eyes, and the lithe grace of her figure bore witness. If hard work had reddened her little hands, it had not destroyed the dimples and taper of her fingers, or the exquisite turn of her slender wrist; and her short, dark skirt of linsey-woolsey no more hid the small arched foot, than the coarse, short gown of linen check concealed her noble white throat or graceful shoulders and slight waist. She was pale, but the curved red lips showed that her pallor was not that of illness, and if you but looked at her too hard the very hue of a pink lily flushed that clear fairness even up to the shining masses of dark brown hair, tucked away behind her tiny ears and braided in a heavy

coiled knot like the tresses of a Greek statue. If Clary had been born a duchess the world would have heard of her ; but she was born a pauper, and was bred in the poorhouse. Perhaps the best blood of Old England ran in her veins, but nobody knew it, and the orphan child of an unknown woman brought in from the roadside, dying with exhaustion and cold, is not often credited with noble lineage.

Guy Morgan was Judge Morgan's son, of Litchfield. The Morgans were an old Connecticut family who had a genealogical tree to fall back on, and Guy was now on his way home from Harvard and its law school. He had been petted in Boston society, for his family were of the Brahmin sort, and their record indorsed him ; he was mentally brilliant, too, and handsome as a young prince is supposed to be. His high, regular features and dark blue eyes were alight with intellect rather than feeling ; but there lay a depth of unrevealed passion and devotion below them.

Clary did not look up at him, for she knew what eyes were upon her from behind the bar ; but he looked at her, and his very heart thrilled at that wonderful beauty, that gracious shape and faultless coloring. He half drained the mug of flip and set it down on the table, turning to speak to this mortal Hebe ; but she had disappeared, and nothing was left for Guy Morgan but to pay his reckoning and mount his horse, reflecting in himself, as he rode away, that Blisset was not ten

miles from Litchfield, and he could and would see that face again.

Now he had seen all the loveliest women in Boston over and over; they had danced with him, walked with him, and done their best to spoil him, as women will spoil a brilliant and handsome young fellow. But not one of them, in all the pride of satin, brocade, or jewels, had ever entered so victoriously into his consciousness as this country maiden in her coarse clothes; dress adorned them, but she adorned dress. He was a well-read youth, and as he trotted briskly over the rough roads, up hill and down, the old ballad of Sir John Suckling kept jingling in his head: —

Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice stole in and out,
As they had feared the light.

.
Her eyes so guard her face
I durst no more upon them gaze
Than on the sun in July.

As for Clary, she did not even give him a thought; for behind the bar, watching her as an ill-conditioned cat glares at its prey, sat Lon Jake-way, the son and heir of her mistress, and the man poor Clary loved.

Goody Jakeway had taken the child from the poorhouse when she was ten years old, finding it would be handy to have a pair of quick feet to run errands, and ready hands to wait on her; for her only child, this same Alonzo, then about sixteen, had run away to sea, and her husband was a

wretched, drunken idler. It was she who kept the family up, and on her rested all the care of the tavern and farm both, as much while her husband lived as after his timely death.

In the service of this rough hard woman Clary Kent grew up, just as a harebell grows in the crevice of some sturdy boulder, neither rightly fed nor sheltered, shaken by all wild winds that blow, nipped by stinging frosts, scorched by midsummer suns, but by the grace of God a harebell still, clad in a beauty and grace that defy position and ignore circumstance. That she had food and clothing she owed to her usefulness, yet they were doled out grudgingly, however hard she earned them ; while her sunny temper, quick perception, fidelity, and serene activity made her a real treasure.

" Well, she 's pretty consider'ble helpful," owned her mistress to Polly Mariner, the tailoress, as she sat by the kitchen window mending Steve the hostler's overalls, for it was haying-time, and neither of the women of the house could spare a moment ; Steve had to hire his sewing done.

" She 's everlastin' smart, now, I tell ye," snapped out Polly, viciously snipping at a patch which would not fit ; " but you 'll have trouble, Mis' Jakeway. She 's a sight too good lookin' for a tavern gal ; somebody or 'nother will marry her up afore you can wink, so to speak, seemin'ly. You 'd as good get what you can out on her whilst she stays."

" My land, Polly Mariner ! I guess folks ain't

in no gre't pucker to marry gals from the poor-house. I don't feel no call whatsoever to fetch trouble out o' that idee. She is reasonable good lookin', I allow for 't; but I'll bet ye a cooky she won't marry them that wants her, and them she wants won't look at her. She's real high-strung, considerin'; but she does well by me, and she's got faculty."

"Well, if she's got faculty, that's the end o' the law, I expect; but if I know human natur', — and it's everlastin' queer if I don't, considerin' how many years I've done tailorin', — you'll reap trouble yet out of that cretur. I never was pretty-lookin' myself, and I allow it tried me whilst I was young; but since I've got along in years some I'm free to confess I don't see why th' Almighty makes girls good lookin'. It fetches heaps of mischief into creation, and don't do no great o' good, as fur as I know."

"Seems to me you're sorter presumptuous, Polly Mariner, to find fault with eternal Providence that way. You don't think, do ye, 't you're smarter 'n the Lord?"

"Land! how you talk, Mis' Jakeway! Folks can have idees, I guess, without faultin' Providence. Well, I won't say no more, — time'll show. And here's Steve after them overalls; my work on 'em's worth ninepence, ef it's worth a cent."

And in a wrangle over the ninepence this ominous conversation ended; but not without leaving

a troubled corner in Goody Jakeway's mind, for of the three things that never return to their first place one is the spoken word.

Two years rolled away, and Clary attained the stature of her womanhood: her somewhat slender figure rounded into fuller outlines of beauty; her girlish grace developed into stately poise and superb curves; her soft eyes learned to darken with scorn, or flash with passion. But so far Goody Jakeway's judgment was correct: the drovers who came to the tavern only disgusted the proud girl with their coarse admiration, although more than one would have gladly married her; the stage-drivers who stopped for a daily dram, and seasoned their flattery well with oaths, pleased her no better; the young louts of farmers, dull, rough, uneducated, only just across the dividing line that separates the human from the bestial, and far less attractive than their own sleek herds,—these, who assembled in the bar-room to talk and drink and smoke clay pipes, were all loathsome to Clary.

Something in her whole nature revolted at the idea of passing her life in any of these companionships, and besides the still but irresistible voice of nature she had found for herself a certain sort of education. Years before she went to the tavern to live, an old man from Hartford had come to spend the summer in Blisset. He was a lawyer, and a native of the place, but, having amassed enough property to live on, returned like a wild animal to his old haunts to die; for die he did before the

summer for which he had engaged board was over. He left his property to a college, but the books in his trunk, and his clothes, were never claimed. Old Jakeway wore out all the linen, and the clothes were cut over for Alonzo's jackets; the books remained, — volumes of what were once called the English Classics, the "Spectator," the "Rambler," the "Tatler," and all that genus, with a volume of Pope and one of Dryden, besides a fine edition of Shakespeare.

All these had Clary fed upon at odd moments with the avidity of a keen mind deprived of any other food, and they had been to her instead of a liberal education. Perhaps in the deepest sense of the term they had educated her liberally; at least, they had lit the lamp, hitherto flameless, in the alabaster vase of her beauty, and added to that fair sculpture the brilliance of lofty thought and ardent feeling; but also they had unfitted her for the stolid life about her, and filled her soul with that restlessness which is the penalty of knowledge.

Of all the pregnant fables that ever streamed from Shakespeare's pen, perhaps the saddest — to a woman — is that of Titania and Bottom. It is called comedy ordinarily; but is there a more profound pathos or a more shuddering tragedy than is contained in the story of that spiritual creature's infatuation for the weaver with the ass's head? And what has time done since Shakespeare's day but reiterate the spectacle of pure and high-

mindful women fondling the ass's head that is not a mask, and whispering, in the delicate voice of devotion, —

“Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek, smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.”

Clary was not quite eighteen when the prodigal son of the Jakeways returned from seafaring; not as the prodigal returned, in* evil case outwardly, but bringing spoils of gold and garments to make him welcome. His father had long since drunk himself to death, but the tavern prospered more and more, once relieved from the drain of drunken extravagance. When Alonzo came back, he found a warm greeting and a good home; the sunniest room in the house was swept and garnished for him; the choicest food and most deft attendance awaited him. He stepped at once into the headship of things with the instinct of manhood: lorded it in stable and bar-room, ordered about his mother and Clary, swore glibly at old Steve, and conducted himself in as ill-conditioned a fashion as his nature dictated.

There was little, one would think, that was attractive about Alonzo Jakeway: he was below the middle height, but his broad shoulders and long arms, his powerful muscular development, and his large, sinewy hands gave him a strength disproportionate to his height; he stooped a little, as most sailors do, and his walk was ungraceful. Nor was

there anything pleasing about his face except a pair of handsome keen gray eyes, deep-set under bushy brows, but capable of expressing every sort of emotion as only gray eyes can. Otherwise his features were coarse, his mouth large and sensual, with a loose under-lip, betraying, when he smiled, a set of strong white teeth, looking carnivorous as a tiger's. All this was capped with a shock of straight pale-brown hair and a half-bronzed forehead that told of foreign suns. And the picture was not altogether attractive to a calm observer who discerned it to be the index of a nature passionate, vindictive, selfish, and undisciplined ; intelligent enough, and capable of attachment to a certain extent, but over all brutal. No doubt he was superior to the men who frequented Blisset tavern in many ways ; his experience of the world had heightened his natural self-conceit to such an extent that his opinion was ready on every subject, and pronounced in that dictatorial manner that always imposes on conscious ignorance. Then his sullen temper and self-absorbed reserve gave him an aspect of unhappiness that is the surest appeal to a thoroughly feminine character. Yet this offers no explanation of the fact, which is as stubborn as acts proverbially are, that Alonzo had not lived in his mother's house twenty-four hours before Clary had lost her heart out of her bosom and dropped the jewel at this swine's feet. If there be metaphysicians who say this thing is impossible, I cannot confute them ; it is true, but inexplicable, that

there are women, and men too, who are struck as by a bolt from the clouds with the one love of their lives, and reason or probability has nothing to do with it.

Why did Mary of Scotland love black Bothwell, or delicate Desdemona the Moor? Why have the worst ruffians of history always had some woman clinging to them or to their memory until death? And what evil woman has not shipwrecked some good man's faith and honor, and made his life a drifting, wretched wreck? And in obedience to this mystic and dreadful exception, which is more stringent often than law, our poor little wayside beauty fell desperately and utterly in love with Alonzo Jakeway. Now this fellow had had the ordinary experience of sailors; he was not unacquainted with women,—of the baser sort, no doubt, but still women. He knew very well that Clary was as far above the level of those whose society he had frequented in port after port as the blue sky in heaven is above its reflection in a muddy pool; yet even from these low examples he had learned something of a woman's nature, which is not always stamped out even by degradation and sin, and it did not take Alonzo Jakeway long to see that this beautiful young creature worshiped him entirely, without any perception of his real character or instinct of his baseness. At first he was naturally flattered; but that mood only lasted long enough to put a tender expression into his eyes, a softer tone into his rough voice, and add a

little consideration to the moody and sullen manners which were his home wear ; and to the girl's hungry heart these crumbs were a feast, inasmuch as they seemed to her infallible promise of returned affection, and fed her day-dreams with the very bread of heaven.

In the bar-room, condescending to his inferiors, or amusing himself with the display of his own information and supreme experience, Alonzo could be agreeable at times and affable ; but there were dark hours when even the established frequenter and wit of the place, Pete Stebbins, found he was not to be approached.

These glooms, which Clary's tender heart laid to the account of chronic pain, or sad recollection, or weariness of this dull life he lived, were in fact nothing more than attacks of ill temper which he had never learned to subdue or conceal. If he over-ate or drank too much liquor for his digestion to endure, — though to do him justice he was never drunk, — he felt, consequently, uncomfortable and angry, and the world about him had to bear it, especially the women. Had he been brought up in polite society, where the outside friction of well-bred people from infancy does, in spite of the utmost self-indulgence and uncurbed temper, modify a man's manner and speech, he would still have been, like a hundred others, "street angel and house devil," and being essentially a coward he did, even here in Blisset, restrain his evil tongue somewhat among men ; but his mother and Clary

were at his mercy ; they could neither knock him down nor return his oaths. Whenever things internally went wrong with him, or outside matters swerved from the line he ordered, it was on these two shrinking women that his temper burst ; for even his mother, hard, rough, enduring as she was, cowered before Alonzo, — because she loved him !

It is a common saying that if a horse knew its own strength no man could guide or mount one ; but is it any less true that if a man knew his real strength he might do anything with women ? If Alonzo had possessed enough knowledge of character to understand himself, he could and would have led these two in a leash after him forever ; even as it was he guided them far and along cruel ways before they knew their guide and the path before them. It was this utter absorption of herself in Alonzo Jakeway that blinded Clary's sight to Guy Morgan that day he stopped in Blisset to get his mug of flip. He might have been one of the "plough joggers," as Alonzo derisively styled the rural farmers thereabouts, or a pig drover, for all the notice Clary bestowed on him ; but from his retreat behind the bar Alonzo noticed the long and unmistakable stare of admiration Guy bestowed on his handmaiden, and a sort of wolfish jealousy sprang up in his breast, mingled with a sudden greed of money hitherto latent. Up to this time he had no thought of marrying Clary ; he knew very well what his mother would say to that, and he did not himself care to be tied up in legitimate bonds. He

could amuse himself with her to the very brink of her ruin, or beyond it, if so he pleased, but it was not for his pleasure to live with mother and wife at daggers drawn in one house. For sin or shame he cared nothing; the very purity of Clary's simple and devoted nature would add a charm to the lazy pursuit whose success he never doubted; and as to her future, who cares for the fate of a flower? Should it not wither and die when its fragrance is over? Nothing so metaphoric passed through his mind, but this is the most delicate expression to be found for his instincts, which indeed need the veil of metaphor. But when he saw Guy Morgan's look at Clary, and perceived that a man's admiration could be respectful, it shot across his mind that the girl might become a great and lucrative attraction in his business. This young spark, whose aspect and dress proved his wealth and position, might be the opening wedge, and spread the fame of the beautiful bar-maid in adjacent towns. Blisset was on a frequented turnpike, and stages from Hartford to Litchfield, and so on to Albany, ran through it. A little exertion might induce them to stop there for dinner instead of at Litchfield; and then, — well, if some crazy city fool, as he phrased it, saw this girl, she might be snapped up out of his reach and use. As his wife, this would be impossible; she would be a fixture in the tavern, and an attraction, while in this Puritan country whatever shame attached itself to a less honorable connection would redound to his discredit and injure his business.

Beside, if Clary were his wife, young sparks like Guy Morgan would have to be careful how they stared at her ; and here Alonzo stretched out one long arm and clenched fist, with a sudden gleam of ferocity in his eye that showed what vengeance would be visited on any man who meddled with his property.

So, following the devices of his own craft and will, he began to word the love he had hitherto only looked at poor Clary ; a whisper now and then, a pressure of the soft little hand in his own, a stolen kiss, a gentle carefulness,—all these produced their effect on the guileless and tender heart of this lonely girl. Busy about her house, Goody Jake-way saw nothing of Alonzo's manœuvres ; he was not ready yet that she should ; he did not, indeed, mean to have any previous storms. The plan that suited his ease and assured him success was that on some pretext or other Clary should be sent to Hartford, and he either follow her, or take her there ; that she should stay long enough to make their marriage legal ; and then, when the ceremony was once over, they should return to Blisset, and let his mother help herself if she could.

He found chance enough to insinuate his design into Clary's ear : if she went to the barn to hunt eggs, he was sure to be there before her, with some excuse of inspecting harness or examining the straw, and in among the bean-vines, where she went to gather long pods for dinner, he would be diligently at work also ; when she was sent to gather wild

strawberries on the hill, he lurked in the edge of a neighboring wood, and joined her, till at last, between her overpowering passion and his plausible arguments, she consented to accept his arrangements, and be in readiness to set out for Hartford as soon as his plots matured. But "God disposes," let us thankfully own. Before anything was even fixed upon in Alonzo Jakeway's mind, a very small household matter, the mouse that gnawed the lion's net, intervened. His stock of shirts began to wear out, and his mother, who had inwardly resented the fact that he came home with a goodly supply of these articles, when she had a web of the finest Irish linen laid up these seven years waiting his need, and yards of linen cambric bought in order to ruffle them, was only too glad to install Polly Mariner in the keeping-room, with patterns and hears, thread of the best, and store of needles, in order to take in hand a dozen of ruffled shirts for my master; for Polly was as skillful at nice sewing as at tailoring, and her stitching was not to be matched in Blisset, even by Parson Piper's daughter. She had scarce been at work three days on the dainty fabric when there was an interruption to her duties from a very unexpected quarter. As she left her door one July day to go over to the tavern, she almost stumbled over the prostrate shape of a man lying with his head on her doorstep. At first she thought him some drunken person who had lain down there to sleep; but calling her next neighbor, Pete Stebbins, who was feeding his hens at the

back door, to come and help her, she soon discovered that the man was burning with fever and quite unconscious. He was evidently a sailor, and there was good store of pieces of eight and English guineas in his pocket, but no clue to his name anywhere about his person. Pete was ready enough to take him in and shelter him when he saw the gold pieces, and Polly promised to stop for Dr. Root. All of this made her late for her sewing that day, and Goody Jakeway sent Alonzo over to see where the seamstress was, being in a hurry to get the shirts done.

He did not find her at home, for she was in the doctor's office ; so he sauntered into Pete's house to make inquiry, and finding no one in the kitchen went on into the bedroom. Just as he entered the doorway the strange man recovered consciousness and opened his eyes. Alonzo started as if he had been shot, turned the color of clay, and drew back. A sort of spasm convulsed the stranger ; he clenched his hands and tried to spring at Alonzo, but his muscles refused to obey the angry will ; the fevered brain gave way with the effort, and he sank again into stupor and delirium.

In Alonzo's astonishment he quite forgot that Pete Stebbins stood by the bedside, and had eyes whose acuteness seemed to make up in rapidity of perception for the inborn laziness of his temperament.

That night when Polly went over to watch with the sick man (for Mrs. Stebbins was a deaf and

dumb woman, and of no use here), Pete accosted her with, "Say! ye ben to the tavern to-day?"

"Well, I guess I have," answered Polly, "I'm makin' Lon Jakeway a set o' shirts fit for a lord, and he's in an everlastin' takin' to get 'em done, I lo' know what for; but Mis' Jakeway she pesters me so, seems as if I should caterpillar. I can't sew no faster 'n I can, if the sky falls. Stitchin' ain't flyin' work, now, I tell ye; and it's seventeen underd linen, as sure as you're alive; and them ruffles! Goshen! I'd jest as soon put them things on to the old ram as on to Lonzo; there ain't no fitness, so to speak, seemin'ly, in dressin' ech a feller in purple an' fine linen."

"W-e-ll," drawled Pete. "I expect he's a hard retur. I don't reely want to tell on 't 'a-flyin' all broad,' as the hymn-book says, but he come in here to-day for suthin' or 'nother, and opened the door est as this sick feller kinder come to I'd gin him a swingein' dose of brandy, ye see, fourth proof, nly jest sort o' laced with water, an' I guess it tung. He riz up in bed and he see Lonzo, and Lon he see'd him. Good Jerus'lem! I wisht ou'd seen Lonzo's physimogony; he was jest the olor of a cold biled turnip. I never did! And his feller he sot his teeth and kinder give a spring. Law! he could n't do it no more 'n a broken-kneed rasshopper; he gin out dyrect, and went off stupid gin. But you bet there's suthin' out o' shape be-ixt 'em!"

"Well, I b'lieve you!" exclaimed Polly. "And

what's more I mistrust Lonzo is kind of sweet on Clary Kent. I hope 't ain't so ; she's a real pretty girl, — as good a girl as ever was ; but I keep an eye out, you may rely on 't, and things looks real dubious. I don't say nothin', for Goody Jakeway ain't aware on 't, and she'd like to kill anybody short o' royal blood that durst to marry Lon ; but I b'lieve I'll speak to Clary. I reely think 't's my duty."

"Oh Lord ! don't ye do it, then !" groaned Pete (whose real name by the way was Petrarch !). "I've allers noticed when women-folks got a-goin' on dooty, they'd say the meanest, hatefulest things that ever was ! Say ye like to torment a gal, an' take her down mortally, an' you'll mabbe see how 't is, reely ; but say it's 'dooty,' an' there ain't no whoa to ye, no more 'n to my old mare when she gets her head. I don't see where it's folks's dooty to say pesky things, any way ; ef it's suthin' real agreeable, why" —

But here the harangue was cut off by a cry from the bedroom ; they found the patient stupid no longer, but raving and crying out fiercely, "I'll fetch him, my lass ; cheer up, Mary ! D——d rascal ! Let me go ! Let me go ! I want to get at him !"

Polly was an accomplished nurse, and under her medicaments the poor fellow became more quiet : but at intervals through the night he talked wildy, always on one theme,—a poor girl's desertion, the girl seeming to be his sister, and his fierce desire

to get hold of the man and punish him. In the later hours of the night his ravings grew less and he weaker; only once he sprang up and glared at the door, swearing a great oath. "It's you, is it? I've run you to earth, you villain! I've got her marriage lines, and I'll clap you into Bridewell if I don't kill you first!"

Polly stroked and coaxed and sung a sweet old hymn to him, till she could persuade him to swallow a cup of strong skull-cap tea, and either from pure exhaustion or the mild narcotic and stimulating warmth of his dose he fell into uneasy slumber; and then she stole out and called Pete, who was making a fire in the kitchen, and asked him if he found anything in the stranger's wallet except money.

"Well, I did n't look no further; when I come to the sinners o' war, why I see 't was all right. Folks that hez money in their pockets is giner'ly about right, 'cordin' to my b'lief. I'll fetch the puss an' see."

"I wisht you would," said Miss Polly. "I've got my own misgivin's, 'count o' what he said; seems to hev suthin' on his mind."

So Pete brought the old wallet, worn and stained, and left it with Miss Polly, who searched it thoroughly, and at last discovered in its inmost fold, indeed, where it had slipped between lining and outside, a dirty and creased but quite legible certificate of marriage between Mary Harris, of Liverpool, England, and Alonzo Jakeway, of Blisset, America.

Polly was a woman of discretion, though she loved to talk. She resolved not to make her discovery public, for to trust it to Pete was as if it were printed in the local column of a county paper; he served as the news medium for all Blisset, where only one copy of any journal, the small, dull sheet of the "Hartford Weekly Courant" as it existed in 1790, was taken, and that only by the minister.

She answered Pete's inquiries astutely, when he came back from the shed, by displaying an old brass ring, a slip from an English paper with ship news on it, a true-lover's-knot of blue ribbon with a curl of gold hair caught in its tie, and half a rollicking ballad, such as hawkers sold about the old country.

"Had your labor for your pains, did n't ye?" chuckled Pete.

"T wa'n't no great o' labor," laughed Polly, disagreeably conscious that her own small buckskin purse contained Alonzo Jakeway's secret, and perhaps poor Clary's heart-break.

It would indeed have been a good day for Alonzo that had spared him those new shirts, and sent Polly Mariner in another direction! But her discovery bore consequences she did not dream of, though they delayed long. After it she kept a closer watch than ever on Clary, and made up her mind that she must interpose at once to save the girl from ruin.

Alonzo had gone to New York the day after his interview with the stranger, if such the mere rec-

ognition could be called, but returned as soon as possible. He would not have gone at all except on urgent business, and he came back by way of Hartford, in order to persuade his old aunt that she ought to send out to Blisset for Clary to come and stay with her a while, to wait upon her. Aunt Smith was held in great regard by Goody Jake-way. She was the only near relative her husband had left; but that never would have commended her to the good graces of her niece in Blisset, except for the fact that she was the widow of a well-to-do grocer who had kindly left her all his goods and chattels to dispose of as she would, to the great anger of his own relations. When Alonzo reached home, with an urgent invitation from his aunt to have Clary come and visit her, it happened that Polly Mariner, so as to see better, had taken one of the shirts upstairs to a south window. The next room was Clary's, and Polly could not help overhearing a conversation between her and Alonzo that betrayed to her their plans, for their voices were quite unguarded; Goody Jakeway being three miles off at a quilting, and Clary quite certain that the tailoress was where she left her two hours before, in the keeping-room, not in the least suspecting that the sharp ears of this equally sharp-eyed woman were just the other side of a thin partition in one of the unused tavern bedrooms. Polly could bide her time, but she saw that in this instance she must be prompt. To-day was Tuesday, and on Thursday Clary was to go to Hartford; for Alonzo

well knew that however his mother might grumble she could not, or rather dared not, offend his aunt Smith by denying her request. So after tea, when Polly was ready to go home, she asked Clary to walk along with her and fetch back some red balm flowers she had promised Goody Jakeway, as her task at the shirts was done now. They stopped at the minister's house on the way, and Polly made her companion sit down in the hall while she herself went into Parson Piper's study, and came back with a folded paper in her hand. Then she hurried Clary on, and as soon as they had reached the spinster's queer little brown house, she drew her into the parlor, and without a word of explanation laid before her Alonzo Jakeway's marriage certificate. It was Polly's belief that a sharp, quick thrust is the truest mercy; but it was not pleasant to see Clary's beautiful face turn dead and white as a marble mask. Her hand clutched at her throat a moment as if something choked her, and then she gasped, "I don't believe it!"

"Well, child, that don't make it so," said Polly sadly. "It looks true, and I've took means to find if so be 't is or 't is n't; but Parson Piper he hain't a doubt on 't. He's heered tell of the man that's put his name to 't, him that married 'em; he's chaplain to some seaman's meetin'-house or 'nother over there to Liverpool. Any way, if ever that sick feller comes to rights, he'll know the upshot on 't."

Clary said not another word; like a stunned

creature she set her face toward the tavern and dragged her slow steps thither ; while Polly, knowing that Alonzo had gone to fetch his mother home from the quilting, hastened back to give the certificate into Parson Piper's hands again, and the worthy man proposed, as he was going to drive over to Litchfield early in the morning, that he should take the paper over and have an attested copy made of it, to guard against accident.

He and Polly both knew that accident meant Alonzo, but with proper respect for the decencies kept the knowledge to themselves. And well they might have dreaded his rage, for poor Clary, after a night of dreadful anguish and struggle with herself, resolved to tell him at once. A less simple and humble nature might have trembled and daltied with some temporizing arguments, but Clary had in her soul one desire, of Heaven's own planting, that had divine endurance and strength, — the honest desire to do right. She knew it was utterly wrong even to love Alonzo if he was another woman's husband, and she meant to give all her energies to unlearn the passion that held her in such dear slavery. But the first step was plain and near : she must tell him, to begin with, that she knew his double-dealing, and then take the rest of her life to forget her past.

It is true that she ought, according to the strict code of feminine morals, to have ceased at once to have any tender feeling toward such a sinner ; but poor Clary loved him ! It was like taking her life

in her hand to withdraw him to the barn on some pretext early in the morning, and tell what she had discovered. The storm that ensued was fearful. Alonzo Jakeway was not accustomed to thwarting; he would just as soon have expected the white rose-bush by the window to uproot itself and try to scratch him as to have Clary rebel if he asked of her the most menial service, but to have her fly in his face like this was outrageous.

Having partially exhausted his fury in words and threats poured out upon the trembling creature before him, he thrust her roughly aside, and hurried over to Pete Stebbins's house to see if the sick man was yet able to speak rationally, determined to stop his tongue by either force or bribes, and to tell some plausible lie to Clary; for he had already declared to her with a fearful oath that the story was false. He had kept close watch over this stranger's condition, not personally, but through others, and he knew very well that his delirium had continued and his strength grown less every day; but he did not know that in those ravings his own name had more than once met Pete Stebbins's ear and aroused his suspicions.

To-day Alonzo hurried to the house, determined to end the suspense that enraged him. The morning was calm and full of July's rich odors; beds of fern breathed their delicate perfume on the fresh, soft air, and the silence of summer filled all the sky; the sad broad fields, the granite ribs of earth, the quiet woods, all were lapped in peace. There

was not a sound in Pete Stebbins's old red house as the angry man strode across to the bedroom, whose door stood ajar, and where lay the heart of all silence, majestic death. Though the couch on which the pulseless limbs lay straight and cold was poor, with no folds of drapery or garlanded blossoms, though the sheet that revealed the immobile outline was coarse and scant, no king lying in state had more serenity on his white brow or more awful meaning in his pallid lips than this dead sailor, for his face was at once accuser and judge of the criminal before him. And as Alonzo stood and stared at that sculptural mass, memory forced upon him another vision, another face, twin to this, except as woman never is twin to man, crowned with just such clustering gold, lit with such great blue eyes as he knew lay beneath those sealed lids; and he heard a voice saying in sonorous English accents:—

“Whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder!”

He turned away silently, and quitted the house like one in a dream; but as he left the door Pete's yellow dog leaped up and flew at him, and the trivial attack turned back the unwonted current of his thought. He kicked the creature out of his path, and felt a fierce thrill of joy to think that just so this babbler had been flung from his track; there was only the certificate now, and this he must coax out of Polly Mariner.

But Polly was not to be coaxed; her black eyes

snapped as she told him with serene but triumphant contempt that Parson Piper had it in his possession and was gone to Litchfield.

"'T ain't no use to swear!" she remarked blandly. "You can't get it to-day, nohow, and you can't ondo it if you could. Black an' white don't lie;" and Alonzo bitterly owned to himself that this was true.

However, he did see the certificate in due time, and vindicated the parson's penetration as well as Miss Polly's; for no sooner had the document been placed in his hands than he tore it in pieces and threw them all from the open window, looking round to see only a calm smile on the parson's face, and to hear: —

"You have done no harm, young man; that was but an attested copy, and there are more. Beside that, the original is not in reach."

Nothing now remained for the baffled man but to make the best of the situation, and the best was bad. The affair could not be kept from his mother, of course, and she was furious; her rage all fell upon poor Clary, who found it easier to bear than the other anguish which had befallen her, and who did her best to please and serve her mistress, in the vain hope of some future peace. It so happened that her term of bondage was not quite over; it had been specially extended in her case to her nineteenth year, because she was eleven years old when the authorities indentured her to Mrs. Jakeway. It might have been the first

result of that woman's wrath to turn Clary out of the house ; but she could not do so legally, and when the first bursts of fury had expended themselves she felt that the girl's services were worth too much to part with, and she could at least have the satisfaction of making her feel in every fibre what presumption and crime she had been guilty of, not only in daring to love Alonzo, but in supposing he really meant to marry her, and then in "turning up her nose at him," as Goody Jakeway expressed it, merely because she imagined he was married over seas ! So Clary's daily bread was doled out to her with a full allowance of coarse taunts, bitter reproaches, vulgar revilings, and the low but torturing scoffs a coarse and hard woman knows too well how to bestow on a sensitive, shrinking girl whom she has in her power. Truly she watered her food with her tears, and her nights were full of an anguish which the torments of the day only delayed till their hour and power should come upon her. But worst of all — far, far worse than his mother's fiercest tyranny — was the persistent endeavor of Alonzo to make her put aside her sense of right and duty and clope with him.

He swore by every oath he knew that the woman he once married in Liverpool was dead, — dead long ago ; but he could not prove it. Then he said the marriage never was legal, for there were no witnesses ; but this excuse revolted Clary more than his first subterfuge appeased her. He uttered every lie he could think of, and used every threat

his experience suggested ; and when they all failed against the strength of a pure purpose in this fragile, heart-broken, wretched girl he pleaded with the traitor within her, divining in his devilish subtlety that she loved him as only a woman can love, in spite of his anger, his cruelty, his lies, or his attempts to make her as evil as himself. It was his tender words, the passion in his beautiful eyes, the thrill of sadness and longing in his voice, that shook and melted her very soul ; from which she withdrew, trembling and tempted, to fall on her knees and beg for strength from Heaven to deny herself as well as her lover. And all this obstinacy, as he called it, only fired Alonzo's determination to obtain the prize. Had she been easy of attainment, no doubt his desire to marry her, once fulfilled, would have degenerated into coldness and indifference. It had indeed at first been rather as a matter of policy and gain that he proposed to give her a legitimate right to share his position in the house ; but now he was in vital earnest about it, and the more strenuously she resisted anger, threat, or prayer, the more he set himself to form new plans to subdue her, and the more furiously he flung himself against all the obstacles that she opposed to him,—lying awake by night and brooding darkly by day over the invention of a new malice or a closer tightening of grip that might make her yield. For, once married, he could defy his mother and order her out of the house if he chose ; while as to Mary Harris, he had long ceased

to fear her, since her brother was dead, and she had nobody now to help or interfere for her.

Through all this summer it is not to be supposed Guy Morgan had forgotten the beautiful girl of Blisset tavern. Many an excuse he made to himself for extending his drives or rides as far as that little village; many a time the yellow gig and high-stepping black horse stopped before the door and were taken round to the barn, while he sat down to a common country dinner for the sake of being waited on by Clary. Deeper and deeper did the fair image that already occupied Guy Morgan's heart sink into that goodly abode, though Clary never had given him a sly look or a flitting smile. It was the old merry-go-round of life repeated. Guy loved her; she loved Alonzo; he loved — himself! and, knowing him to be jealous as no one but a selfish man can be, Clary dared not offer the commonest courtesies of life to any other man, much less Guy Morgan. She keenly appreciated this handsome young fellow's grace, refinement, high breeding, and kindliness, but it was with a passion of self-devotion which only a woman in love — a woman like her — can know, that she rejoiced to keep even her outward manner cold and reserved except to him she loved. Polly Mariner's sharp eyes, however, soon perceived the situation. She knew very well that the Morgans would not countenance Guy's infatuation, and she knew too that he was a gentleman, — a word that meant something in those days, — and would not harm Clary

in word or deed, so she only smiled to herself at the little drama before her ; for, like most women, she held the love of a man to be a light matter, never vital, and rather enjoyed seeing masculine struggles upon the baited hook, just as a trout-fisher becomes interested in the beautiful creature that spins and splashes at the end of his companion's line.

But now, when Polly saw that Clary's troubles were growing heavier and more unendurable day by day, the courageous and sensible woman borrowed a tame old horse and rather dilapidated sulky, and set out for Litchfield alone, — on “law business,” she said. She went to Guy Morgan's office, for he had begun to practice law, and laid the case before him, confiding to him certain steps she had already taken.

He heard her with ill-concealed rage and grief ; but as the interview ended he said : —

“ You have done all you can, Miss Mariner ; you will not have to wait a great while, I think, for results. But meanwhile you must promise me that if any new development happens you will send for me at once. I suppose you will not leave Blisset ? ”

“ My sakes ! I guess not. I would n't leave there for nothing you could mention ! She don't mistrust that I'm her friend, Clary don't. I've hed to fetch this trouble on to her. ‘ Faithful are the wovnds of a friend,’ Scriptor says, but it don't say but what they hurt jest as much as the wovnds of an inimy. I think they do wuss, becos you're

kind of obleeged to keep in about 'em ; can't spit out, so to speak, as 't were."

Mr. Morgan smiled, and Polly, whipping up her old horse, drove back to Blisset, feeling as if she had some strong support to fall back on, whatever occurred. She would have relied on Parson Piper, but that worthy man lay at death's door with typhus fever, and if ever he recovered, which Dr. Root doubted, wagging his head with great solemnity, he would be months in getting back to life and strength again ; and Polly judged wisely in concluding that she should need some one having authority in any contention with Alonzo Jakeway.

About the end of August, when it seemed to Clary that endurance would fail and life with it, Alonzo appeared to be relieved from some pressure of thought and doubt that had long kept him meditative and gloomy. A dull fire lit his gray eyes with a sort of evil satisfaction ; and though his mother, with feminine persistence, kept up her nagging and reviling of poor Clary, and made her life a burden, he let the poor girl alone for awhile, neither threatening nor coaxing her. Polly watched the whole thing steadily. She distrusted Alonzo none the less for his present forbearance. She could gladly have extended comfort to Clary, but the girl avoided her carefully, and seemed to shrink from her very sight ; so the good woman bided her time, not without wonder at the long delay of her measures for Clary's help, but with no fears as to their ultimate result.

It was now the second week in September, when one morning Alonzo Jakeway came downstairs and asked his mother where she had put his scarlet stockings with gold clocks. These stockings were the pride of his heart, for he had a weakness for finery, and these scarlet hose of heavy silk, gold-embroidered, he had brought with him from abroad, and they figured at every feast Blisset knew in gorgeous contrast with a pair of black velvet breeches, a red satin vest, also gold-embroidered, and a coat of fine French cloth with silver buttons.

There was to be a wedding to-night in Goshen, and Alonzo's dress must be in readiness. Clary had ironed one of his new shirts, clear-starched the frill, and done up his laced cravat to a nicety, lingering over the task as if it were a pleasure, as indeed it still was her delight to do any service for the man she loved. But this morning he could not find the stockings, and great was his wrath; he stormed and swore, and his mother hunted over all his possessions and her own too, but in vain. At length, with a face of dark menace, Alonzo left the house, and returned in two hours with the village constable and a search-warrant from the nearest justice of the peace, who lived in Noppit. On the authority of this, every room in the house was examined, — the hostler's hair trunk, the bags of a miller stopping over night on business, the chest of drawers in the schoolteacher's room, who had just come there to board, and last of all Clary's little blue chest, where her small store of clothes lay in

due order, with sprigs of cedar and sweet basil strewn amongst them.

There, in the folds of her best sprigged cotton gown, her only Sunday gown, lay the red stockings !

Clary was horror-struck. Her dry lips could not part to speak ; her knees refused to support her ; she sunk into the nearest chair, and all the spectators cried out upon her guilty face.

So does man judge ! The very agony of insulted innocence is accepted as the aspect of guilt. Shame and horror hang out the same signals with convicted crime. There are not two ways for the blood to leave the heart, or to rush back to it, — one way of sin and another of purity ; and Clary was condemned in the eyes of all who saw her by the very semblance of her guiltlessness.

But nothing availed her now ; not her solemn asseverations of innocence when speech at last returned.

Law and justice — if indeed it is not a matter of libel to mention these together — were somewhat ignorantly and clumsily administered in Blisset. A sudden trial was held before the Noppit justice. There were enough to swear that Clary had meant to marry Alonzo Jakeway, and the match had been broken off some time ; doubtless she bore him a grudge, accordingly, and stole the stockings in revenge.

This accusation struck poor Clary dumb. She knew such pitiful meanness was as far from her

soul as earth from heaven ; but she could see that the judge, a heavy, plodding old farmer, believed it ; he judged her, as we all do other people, from his inward self, and the case was hopeless. It remained only for the constable to swear that he found the said red silken hose in her chest, hid in her Sunday gown, and the judge was outwardly as well as inwardly convinced. He pronounced her guilty, sentenced her to pay a fine of one hundred dollars, or, in default of ability to pay such fine within the two weeks ensuing, to receive thirty lashes on her bare back at the whipping-post on Blisset green ; and in the mean time to be conveyed to the lockup, a bare little room with grated windows, above the store and post-office of the village, being partitioned off from the public hall, which occupied the second story of the store, and reached from the outside by an open stairway.

For the first time in her life Clary Kent fainted when she heard this sentence. Worn out with long suffering, constant labor, and the intense heat of the past summer, the flesh could not endure one more buffet from the spirit, and in a state of merciful senselessness she was carried back to Blisset, taken up the outer stair, and left to recover as she might on the rough sacking cot provided for the rare occupants of the strong room.

When she came to herself she longed to faint again, for the whole force of the situation rushed upon her like a flood, and the judge's sentence was burnt in upon her brain as with hot irons. A

hundred dollar fine ! and she had not a hundred cents. Another girl in her place might have gathered some small store from the generosity of the tavern guests, but Clary so disliked notice, was so sure to slip out quietly when her service was ended, that those who wished to give her money got no opportunity to do so, and those who would have given it from habit were glad of the chance to escape the tax. Guy Morgan would as soon have offered gold to the haughtiest woman in Boston as to Clary. Yet even if all these had bestowed gratuities upon her, she would have been nowhere near possessing a hundred dollars ; it was as unattainable to her as the wealth of Cræsus.

And the alternative !

She had once accidentally passed the whipping-post when a man had paid the old-time penalty of stealing. An awful fascination chained the child, then only thirteen years old, to the spot ; but she had never forgotten the barbaric spectacle. She could see still the thongs that lashed him to the post, the bare, glistening back, the descending lash, the purple welt that followed ; she could recall with the distinctness of absolute vision the quiver of that sturdy figure, the groans he vainly tried to repress, the brutal jeers of the crowd, and the red blood that spattered on to the snow under the victim's feet. And all this lay before her ! All ? A thousandfold more, for she was a woman, and the lash was no more dreadful in her eyes than the exposure of her sacred person, the violence done to

her virgin modesty. She did not once think of hope. Her nature had been so long crushed into earth by misfortune and suffering that her first impulse was to despair. She fell off the cot on to her knees, and, prostrate on the floor, prayed with the whole force of a desperate soul that God would let her die before the day of her trial came.

From this absorption she was roused by the trembling voice of Polly Mariner, who had climbed the stair and was calling her through the grated door. Clary rose, and looked at her with a shudder.

"Keep up your heart, child! — keep up!" sobbed Polly, crying as much with rage as with sorrow, for she had only just heard the story, and referred the whole thing to its right source directly. "You'll be took care of; there's them will see to 't. Look here; I've fetched ye a blauket an' a big sheet. It's warm weather, but September sunshine ain't reliable; mabbe you'll want bedclothes. And I've spoke to the constable, an' he's goin' to fetch ye a piller and suthin' to eat. You won't be here long, noways. I'm a-goin' over to Litchfield, post-haste, to fetch help. Keep up your sperits."

"Oh, Miss Polly," sighed the girl, inspired with hope by the cheery voice and assurance, "can anybody help me?"

"Land, yes! Anybody can pay your fine, can't they? I could myself, ef I had the dollars. I hain't got 'em, but I'll get 'em."

A thrill of stronger hope awoke in the girl's heart.

"Oh, then I know Lon will pay it! He will!

he will! Oh, I ain't a bit afraid, Miss Polly; he'll get me out."

"He!" ejaculated Polly, with a scorn type is powerless to express. "He help you! Why, if you war n't in trouble, I should say you was the biggest fool in Blisset. Why, if you knowed beans, you'd know he was to the bottom of all on't. Do you expect them stockin's walked into your chist an' crawled inside o' your gown of themselves?"

Clary's eyes grew dark with horror; it was true, somebody must have put them there.

"May be 't was her," she said tremulously; meaning, as Polly well knew, Goody Jakeway.

"Not a bit of it; she 's ugly enough, but she ain't 'cute enough. Besides, she don't want to lose ye; she 's buzzin' round now like a bee in a tar barrel to get somebody to help her, but there won't none o' the decent gals in Blisset go where Lon Jake-way is."

Clary did not notice this small scoff which Polly really could not help giving; she only went on:—

"I know Lonzo will pay for me. Why, Polly, he — he likes me!" and here a warm blush suffused her beautiful face. "He — well, I never told anybody before, but he wants to marry me just the same. He says that woman's dead, and I only waited to be sure; he's promised to find out. Do you think he'd let me be whipped?" Her piteous voice changed to a ring of scornful triumph as she asked the question, but Polly responded promptly:—

"Yes, I do ; but there 's them that won't. I'll fix it. Land ! there 's three-o'clock bell over to Noppit ; lecter preparatory, but I ain't goin'. I must hurry up. Good-by, child ; I'll be here airy in the mornin'. Keep up your sperits !"

But "spirits" will not come at call, and Clary sank into despondence as soon as Polly's face disappeared. She was roused again by the constable, who fetched her some supper and a pillow, and when dusk fell, worn out by emotion, she laid her weary limbs along the cot, and fell fast asleep.

It was at the dead of night that she awoke, hearing her name again ; this time it was Alonzo Jakeway ; her heart bounded as she recognized his voice. But it sank to deeper depths when he made known the object of his visit : it was to tell her that if she would marry him at once he would pay the fine and set her free. Here was a trial fit for a martyr of old time ; she had but to do that which her heart had all along prompted, and she was saved. But there was one question first to ask : —

"You know I did n't steal them, Lon ?"

"I do' know who knows it better," was the surly reply. "Look here, Clary Kent, I've got ye now, tight and sure. I've planned and plotted on't along back, so 's it should be tight and sure. I put them stockin's there, for I meant to get a grip on ye. Now take your choice, — to be stripped and whipped, or marry me. If you're a halfway decent gal, you won't demur much."

Clary sprang back from the grating, all her blood

on fire with the dastardly insult. She seemed to grow tall and strong ; her voice, softer than any cooing flute, took on the ring of a clarion.

"Go away !" she said. "I had rather die than marry you now, Lonzo Jakeway !"

"Wait a bit !" he sneered. "I guess a fortnight 'll change your mind ; bread an' water an' locked doors is pretty convincin'," and with an evil laugh he turned away and stole softly down the stairs.

Poor Clary ! this was her bitterest hour. The bandage was torn from her eyes, and she saw the man — no ! not the man she loved, but the real man, who had borne about as a garment the image and superscription of her God. Death would not have been as hard. In the agony of bereavement and disgust she tossed on her pallet till daybreak, and then she heard a heavy footstep toil up the stairs ; it was Polly Mariner. She said, trying to smile, —

"Well, dear, I can't fetch it about to-day. The feller that 's got the money he 's took an' gone off to Boston of an arrand, but he 'll come back, — yes, he will ; he 's a-comin' shortly, and I 've left a billet for him. You 'll hev to stay here a spell, mabbe, but it 'll all come right."

Clary looked at her with dull eyes. "There won't ever anything come right any more," she said stupidly ; and this was the fixed belief of her soul.

In vain Polly brought her food of the nicest she could prepare, decent clothing, a Bible, a hymn-

book, Boston's "Fourfold State," and Jenks's "Devotion," her whole store of literary amusement; or thrust through her grating early apples and late peaches, or musky bunches of wild grapes; she could not coax a smile over the beautiful wan face, or instill a spark of hope into the breaking heart.

She had told Clary the truth, as far as it went. She found Guy Morgan had gone to Boston, and she left a letter to be given him as soon as he returned; but for security the black boy who waited on the office slipped the queer, ragged note into a legal volume, and then forgot all about it. Polly's errand had been vainer than she knew,

So the days wore on: Clary still in the dull desolation that possessed her, and Polly fuming to herself at Guy's delay. She would have made another journey to Litchfield, but she dare not leave Clary alone; some vague fear was always present with her when she saw or recalled the girl's set face; so she waited as well as she could, not for Guy alone, but for the result of measures she had taken long before to deliver Clary from Alonzo's net. More than once or twice in the dead of night the desperate man visited Clary again, and poured threats and persuasions through the grating, but never did he receive any answer of word or look. Still he clung to the belief that at the last moment he should conquer, and went away in that conviction; for he could no more understand her pure and lofty nature than a worm of earth can interpret the seraphs of heaven.

At last the end of these weary hours drew near. Miss Polly, grown desperate, dispatched Pete Stebins by sunrise to Litchfield with a strenuous message to Guy Morgan. But the day crept on, and he did not come, for the axle of Pete's old wagon gave out halfway there, and he had first to clear the road of the obstruction, and then walk the remaining five miles; happily for Polly, she knew nothing of this delay. It was the first day of October, and the languid splendor of early autumn brooded in soft glory over the low hills about Blisset; the woods were lit here and there by a scarlet bough, and one great maple like a torch of fire flamed on the little green; nothing stirred, but the sad chirping of the crickets rose sharp and grievous as a dirge from the damp grass, and now and then a wailing south wind shed a bright leaf softly to the ground. A ring of curious people crowded already about the whipping-post, and close by it stood Alonzo Jakeway, waiting for his victim's appearance.

Just at ten o'clock the constable came down the stairs of the strong room, leading Clary; her white feet were bare below her short stuff petticoat, revealing their exquisite shape and dimpled beauty, and over her shoulders a dark blue blanket was loosely thrown.

In her cell she had only the simplest necessities of toilet, so she had knotted the rich masses of her hair loosely on the top of her head, tucking in the ends to keep it in place as well as she could. Her

beautiful, despairing face was like moulded alabaster, so pure, so pallidly transparent, and her great brown eyes were filled with unutterable woe. She was brought forward, and her hands passed around the post and lashed there. Alonzo Jakeway went up to her and whispered a word. She looked at him as one who saw him not; but when the constable, with sudden roughness, tore the blanket from her back, and the sculptural shoulders and ivory neck were bared to sight, over every glistening surface and perfect outline a scarlet flush swept like the reflection of sudden flame, and in the agony of outraged womanhood an appeal burst from her parted lips: —

“O Lon! Lon! save me!”

But like a tiger gloating over his prey, the man, who was less man than brute, stood moveless. A fierce and bestial joy filled his soul; he saw this proud girl humbled to the ground, and was greedily glad; his hunger of wrath and revenge tasted blood, and as his red and eager eyes met hers with a look of scorn, the uplifted lash descended along those snowy shoulders, and a piercing, horrid shriek rent the air as a long purple welt marked the smooth and polished skin. But hardly was the constable's arm raised again when something burst madly through the crowd; the whip was torn from his hands; the thongs that bound her cut apart; and as if the lash had stung her to life, Clary's first instinctive motion was to lift her hand, and loosening her heavy hair drop its dusk veil over her shoulders. She did not

see how like a flash Alonzo Jakeway was sent flat to the ground, nor yet that the interposer in her behalf was Guy Morgan, whose black horse stood now foaming and panting, while his master counted out the fine to the indignant constable. Polly Mariner, sobbing and chattering, got a big camlet cloak about poor Clary, and led her away to her own house.

And now into this homely drama, in the commonplace chariot of a creaking chaise, entered another actor, who should have been here long before if winds and waves had not delayed Polly Mariner's letter to Liverpool. When Alonzo Jakeway recovered from the thorough thrashing which Guy Morgan proceeded to give him with the same lash that had seared Clary's shoulders, his eyes opened on the living face of Mary Harris, his wife, to whom Polly Mariner had written, sending all her little savings that she might come to Blisset and prove her rights.

It was in the eternal fitness of things that she should never after forgive Polly for this intervention, for on her head, with the cowardice and brutality of his nature, Alonzo visited his anger and unsated cruelty; and no one who knew him expected any better result. But she had saved Clary from the like fate, Polly thought, and that was enough for her; for to no human being did the poor girl ever reveal her midnight interviews and her murdered affection. Clary lay long at Polly Mariner's house ill of a dreadful fever, and when

at last she recovered, Heaven visited her, in mercy, with utter oblivion of the past; she was even more intelligent and lovely than ever, but her memory was a blank. Under Polly's care she was taken to Boston, and put in charge of an old lady, one of Guy's friends, who was rich and lonely, and romantic enough even in her age to sympathize with young love. Here the poor girl found shelter, protection, and affection in her new world of consciousness; and here she received for a few years the training and education of a lady.

It was nothing to her that Alonzo Jakeway became a hopeless drunkard and died like his father before him, or that Polly Mariner, her truest friend, fell a victim to that typhus fever which decimates some New England towns at uncertain intervals.

Clary had no past; and if ever her awakening intelligence questioned it, she was always answered that she was an orphan, and Mrs. Grey had taken her when she was very ill. In time Guy Morgan visited her, and renewed the attentions she did not remember; and now she received them with shy sweetness, for she loved him as fervently as she had loved Alonzo. After their marriage they went to live in a flourishing Western city, and Clary was for a lifetime the pride and delight of his home and heart, transmitting her beauty as a heritage to children and grandchildren, who are to this day as ignorant as she mercifully remained till the hour of her death of Clary's Trial.

A DOUBLE THANKSGIVING.

“GIRLS don’t know anything anyhow!”

Sally laughed, though the tears stood in her bright eyes, as grandma Jopp snapped out her formula of contempt; but the old lady neither minded the gentle laugh nor the shining tears; she had “found liberty,” and her voluble tongue took up the rôle again.

“You don’t know what you’re a-comin’ to, Sally; you’re only a girl; you think gittin’ married is all honey and posies, but I’m an old woman, seventy year old, married fifty year ago, and I know suthin’. Land! how yer granther used ter dance round me when I was a gal! There want nothin’ too good for me them times, nothin’ too slick for him to say. I was a beauty, and a poppet, and sweetheart, and dear knows what all. It’s mawkish to think on’t now. I don’t say but what I was as big a fool as you be. I did set by him a heap, but land’s sakes! ’t was over with quicker’n nothin’, after we’d ben married a spell, an’ settled down to stiddy grind.

“There wa’n’t a lot o’ honey and posies in gettin’ a biled dinner, doing hay-makers’ washin’, bilin’ soap, an’ pig-killin’ time. I tell ye its work, work, work, for poor folks; and if you know what’s good for ye, you’ll take up with Squire Simmons, ’nd let Joe Hazard go to — sea.”

"I hate Squire Simmons," ejaculated Sally, drawing up her slender figure to its height, and coloring with indignation. "I'd rather be an old maid ten times over than marry him."

"Well, there 's wuss things than bein' an old maid : ef you 're capable, and pleasant, and smart, you 'd jest as good be an old maid as be a poor man's wife."

"Depends on who the poor man is," put in Sally demurely.

"Well, you know the old sayin', Sally, 'When poverty comes into the door, love flies out o' the winder.'"

"That 's because people open the windows," laughed Sally.

"Oh, go 'long! you 're a master hand to jump the fence, but some day you 'll rek'lect what I tell ye, and wish you 'd counceled with grandmother Jopp."

"Well, grandma, if I do, I 'll tell you so."

"Shaw! you won't hev me to tell. I shall be in my grave long afore you get to that p'int, Sally."

"I never knew anybody die yet that was always expectin' to, grandma. I 'm quite certin you will live at least ten years after I 'm married."

"Then you *be* a-goin' to marry Joe Hazard?" eagerly retorted the old woman.

Sally sat down in the chair by which she was standing, and laughed till the tears rose in her eyes, for just as grandma Jopp faced round upon her with this question, neatly dodging the matter of

her own living or dying, Sally saw Joe Hazard's curly black head and laughing eyes thrust through the morning-glories before the further window.

"Yes, marm, I reckon she is," shouted the undaunted Joe, and grandma whirled round again to confront this unexpected visitor.

"Well, if you hain't got the most brass," was her breathless remark, as she glared at him over her spectacles.

"Good sea-goin' metal, ain't it?" inquired he with comic gravity.

"You've got enough on 't to sink a ship. I advise ye to take to dry land," snapped grandma.

Joe began to sing under his breath "Cease, rude Boreas," which sent Sally into fresh fits of laughter, and running out of the farmhouse, she captured the offending party, and they both sat down on the south doorsteps to hold sweet converse together, for Sally was not in the least frightened by her grandmother's grim experience and advice. She was filled with diviner lessons; dreams of youth and love that laugh at experience, and believe their world is *the* world, and their life *the* life of all humanity, that grief is the exception, and happiness the rule; that "now" is eternal, and love immortal.

Sweet souls! it is "a trailing cloud of glory" from their last home, and it is to life what the flower is to the fruit, the calyx to the flower, the shoot to the calyx, the seed to the shoot. But for its shelter, its folding warmth, its strong hope and

faith, the buds, yea, the very germs of life would faint, wither, die, and we should reap no harvest, be gathered into no heavenly garner hereafter.

Grandmother Jopp was an ordinarily pleasant and sensible old lady, but, like most of her type, she thought as people said of her, that "There ain't much she don't know, an' what she don't know ain't worth knowin'."

It did not occur to her that a more affectionate nature, a gentler spirit, less selfishness and impatience on her own part, would have made married life easier and sweeter both for her and her husband ; but grandpa Jopp was a silent, slow, weakly sort of man, and while his wife scolded and found fault with him, he only looked wretched and kept out of her way as much as he could ; so naturally enough, she thought herself in the right. He did it "for peace's sake," poor cowardly soul ! unaware that in the wars of matrimony, as in the wars of nations, it is necessary to conquer a peace. A good sound rating, or even a sturdy shake, would have restored the balance of power, and given him his right position ; but he dared not assert himself so, and went on into his grave, the despised servant of a wife who ought to have loved and respected him, and been a comfort instead of a curse.

Joe Hazard was not of this sort, nor was Sally Hart fashioned after her maternal grandmother's type ; her dark red hair, her soft, deep hazel eyes, her merry, cheery nature, and tender, faithful soul,

all came from the Hart side of the family, and promised a safe harbor for even a sailor's roving heart. Sally had been "down to salt" at Matoonoc beach three years in succession with aunt Lyddy, grandma Jopp's eldest daughter, a widow with some property and a great deal of asthma, for the relief of which she visited the shore every year, taking Sally with her for company, since she was the only niece the childless woman had. They boarded in one of the gray, weather-beaten houses that dot the meadows along the Rhode Island shore, — houses so dim and misty in their tempest-worn hue that they seem like feeble mezzotints faintly outlined against the sparkling, heaving sea before, or the verdant stretch of grassy fields behind them.

But the inhabitants were kindly, and board was cheap; fish, chickens, eggs, were plenty; vegetables grew for the planting; the great Narragansett swamp afforded blueberries in abundance, and the hills were set thick with huckleberry bushes, and trailed over by bounteous dewberry vines. It was a simple, quiet, homely place. Aunt Lyddy's husband had a sister living three miles back from the shore, and she had found them a boarding-place with Sam Tucker, whose wife was glad enough to get a little money for her own and her children's adornment.

It was all very well for Sally at first, this quiet farmhouse and this lonely shore. She spent her days out of doors entirely, though with the thrifty

instinct of New England, she carried her knitting or her tatting along ; but these were soon disposed of in her pocket, and while her aunt sat on the fish-house steps, or made herself at home in the hot sun and the sand, glad enough of a free breath, and resting her tired lungs, Sally scoured the beach far and near : gathered stones to fill her basket ; fished up seaweed from the whispering fringes of foam ; gathered “ money - purses ” and “ salt cel-lars ” by the dozen ; wondered under which gray old boulder, planted deep mid sand and sea, Cap-tain Kidd’s hoard lay sleeping ; or, tired of roam-ing, came back and sat beside aunt Lyddy, and watched the long green rollers come roaring up the sand, rearing their tossing, shining manes high in air, white and light with myriad foam-bells, only to dash them on the shivering shore, with the soft rush and crush of breaking bubbles and sliding seas, that recoiled for fresh assault, and returned with new splendors of beryl depths and fleecy crests, to roar and fall again. Splendid vision ! which a worn and weary heart could watch forever, losing in this vast, dumb force and glory its own sense of present anguish or despair, and feeling in every fibre the sad sweetness of that mighty soul that fled from its temple in such a sea, but breathed out first in human words such human longing —

“ I could lie down like a tired child,
And breathe away this life of care
Which I have borne, and still must bear,
Till death-like sleep should steal on me,

And I should feel in the warm air
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony."

But Sally was young and a girl! She craved life and variety, and she was getting woefully tired of the dull days before half her last summer at Matoonoc had gone, when, luckily for her, the Nancy Beers sailed into Boston Bay from a China voyage, and her second mate, handsome Joe Hazard, came home to see his "folks," and saw Sally Hart too.

There was wailing and weeping among the beach girls when they saw Joe devoting himself, day after day, to this up-country creature.

Were n't his own sort good enough for him? Evidently Joe thought not. Cynthia Tucker, and Demy Hazard, and Bet Hazard, and Red Joe Tucker's twins, — for they were all Tuckers or Hazards at Matoonoc, — all these had set their various caps in vain at Joe, ever since he was a man and a mate on the Nancy Beers, instead of boy or common sailor; for Joe had taken to the sea since he was big enough to take to anything, and had worked his way up; but now, after all their fascinations had failed, after blue eyes, gray eyes, green eyes, had tried their darts in vain, after every feminine charm of his own neighbors and friends had proved useless, here was a girl from up-country, a white, slim thing, had but to look at him, and he was captured.

"I dono what he sees in that red-headed thing,"

snapped Demy Hazard. "She can't no more row a boat than she can stan' on her head. I scar't her to death most, t' other day, when we was out a bathin', a-pullin' on her out into a breaker."

"She ain't no more into her 'n a piece o' rag-weed," chimed in one of the Tucker twins, "she can't dig a clam. I fetched her round to the salt pond a Saturday, 'n' I'll be drowned ef she did n't ketch up a crab to look at it. Did n't it ketch her, though? I tell you she hollered like a gale o' wind."

"Well, I expect Joe 'll suit himself; menfolks do, mostly," sighed Cynthia Tucker, who was occupied along with the rest in the pleasant amusement of clawing reluctant clams from their sandy bed, with a sort of tool compromised between a rake and a hoe.

Demy laughed, but Bet Hazard, who was the oldest of the crowd, and in virtue of her sense, her years, and her experience, something sarcastic, growled out in a deep voice: —

"I expect they do! I dono who 'd undertake to suit 'em. I 'd ruther sail a pinky round Pint Judy pint in a sou'easter then pick out a man's gal for him. A man hed oughter git leave to choose his own boat 'nd his own wife, I say; an' ef he don't git it, he giner'llly takes it; 'specially ef he's a Hazard."

There was no doubt Joe belonged to that family. In any other, his inherited name of Josiah never would have been shortened into Joe; and his dark,

crisp curls, his flashing black eyes, his clear brown skin, attested convincingly his descent; for the "black Hazards" were as well known about the shore as the Black Douglas in Scotland.

As for Sally, she found it mighty pleasant to have a devoted admirer fall at her feet in this desert; she was used to it at home, and thought little of three or four scalps dangling at her belt; but here she had been dull for a long time; the swains of Baxter had not followed her, for the good reason that they were following the plough, or wielding the hoe just at present, and had no time to philander round the country in their Sunday clothes. But here was a handsome, bright, active young fellow, who had capitulated at once, and become her devoted attendant. Now there were no more lonely walks on the shore; under his guidance and care she walked over the bare gray hills to gather berries; was borne in a little rowboat over the tranquil bosom of the salt ponds, and taught to catch sprawling crabs with a scoop-net, not to take them in her fingers. For her Joe brought luxuriant clusters of great rhododendron blossoms, cool, fair blooms of rose and white, from the borders of the Great Swamp; dripping armfuls of ivory water-lilies from its deeper recesses and frequent pools; spires of too fragrant clethra; garlands of pale wild roses; quaint garnet blossoms of the dwarf pitcher plant; and rare, wild coreopsis flowers tinted like a shell, and shyly fragile as a dryad might be.

Moreover, he persuaded her so far out of her terrors of the sea that she learned to enjoy a fishing-party in a whaleboat, and to draw in a big bluefish as deftly as Demy Hazard herself; he taught her to paddle a canoe on the lonely, fresh ponds that hid their crystal depths in the forests of the Swamp; to trace those paths that wound their narrow and devious way from one of these desert jewels to the other; and even (on a rainy day, to be sure!) to learn the whole economy of a brig, from boom to jibber-jib, for the Nancy Beers was a brig, and Joe understood her rigging if anybody did!

Poor Joe, he longed to risk his fate too soon, and would have done so, but that Sally, with the tact of a woman, avoided and averted his declaration till he almost feared to speak, and then, just as he was getting desperate enough to throw himself at her head for certainty's sake, he was called away to Boston on ship's business; and though he hurried back, aunt Lyddy and Sally had gone home before he reached the beach, and the honest fellow took it for a finality, and departed on the long voyage, both sad and sore.

It must be owned that the youths of Baxter did not compare well in Sally's eyes with handsome Joe, though she found their devotion unabated; and it must also come to light that her eyes glistened and her heart beat suspiciously over a package that arrived for her by express from Boston, containing a delicate China crape handkerchief, a

chain of crystal beads, and a few rare and beautiful shells, all wrapped up in a paper which advertised the Nancy Beers' sailing on Monday, August 30th, — and this was Monday !

Yet such is the involution and wonderful structure of the female character that if Josiah Hazard had asked Sarah Hart to marry him, she would have refused without compunction or reserve of hope ; while by an unintentionally judicious silence, he awoke a mild pique, an indefinite uneasiness ; and then had the wisdom — equally unconscious — to send her a nameless gift that yet named its giver, and kept him always in mind.

The long, dull winter did not serve to banish Joe from Sally's mind ; she could not but think of him, when the storms howled frantically through the forest, and shook her mother's little brown house with invisible blows. When rain and snow blotted out the sweet skies, she transferred the weather of her inland town to the far-off Nancy Beers, and pitied Joe mightily. Well for her that she did not see the lucky fellow, sailing over warm and tranquil seas, scampering up and down the rigging, telling yarns and cracking jokes with the two or three passengers, and behaving himself generally like a man, as he was, and by no means the sentimental idiot Sally thought him.

Sally did not go to the beach with aunt Lyddy next summer, for her mother was seized with consumption early in the spring, and though she was only her stepmother, yet she had never known any

other, and loved her dearly. Poor Sally! her father had long been dead, and she was the only child; for ten years she and her mother had lived there alone, and grown together as two lonely women will, unless they quarrel. Now she was so absorbed in her new fears, her unusual care, her wearing anxiety, that it gave her scarcely a regret to see aunt Lyddy leave without her; but she took a special interest in the shipping news, and read with care every arrival. But the Nancy Beers made a long voyage of it this time; it was late in August when she was reported, and in the marine news was only a short paragraph stating the death of the first mate on the way home, killed by a falling spar in a gale, and the promotion of Josiah Hazard to fill his place. It was unusual enough to report such a small matter as this in a merchant vessel, and Sally blushed and dimpled over the paragraph, with a certain consciousness that it had been inserted to meet her eye, and she was really sorry she should not see Joe this year; aunt Lyddy was home now, so there was no chance of hearing of him.

Miss Sally reckoned without her host. The first days of September were warm and clear; the windows of the little brown house were set wide to catch the sweet air, a few late roses and a bed of luxuriant mignonette perfumed the gentle breeze that swayed Sally's rich curls as she sat on the doorstep with her sewing, while her mother slept; perhaps it was the rustle of that breeze in the lilacs

and rosebushes close beside her that prevented her hearing a step on the path ; but she felt a shadow on her sunshine, and looked up to see handsome Joe Hazard standing in the soft blaze, smiling like a bit of sunshine himself.

Sally was gladder to see him than she meant to be, and showed it, and Joe sat down beside her on the doorstep, lest they should waken the invalid. For the same reason their voices were lowered to a confidential pitch, and though Joe, being a native gentleman, forbore to harass Sally with an obtrusive exhibit of his own plans and hopes, he did contrive to get leave to come again before he sailed, and say good-by ; for his furlough would be short this time. So in a week he reappeared, and persuaded Sally to take a walk with him to the Lake shore, where they sat comfortably down on a log and took counsel together ; on what matters may be inferred from the parting words.

"You 'll think on 't now, won't ye, Sally ? I won't plague for a real yes or no, now, for I see you've got a stormy voy'ge afore you, and you ain't clear how to lay your head yet. We ain't a-goin' to Chiny this year, only down to Rio ; our owners hev changed their trade, or ruther we've changed owners ; so 's 't Providence permittin', as aunt Judy sez, I shall heave anchor in the Bay by next June sartin. Can I come an' see ye then ?"

"We-e-ll," said Sally slowly, tracing a square on the sand with the point of her parasol as deliberately as if her life depended on making four right

angles, "I don't know but what it's a free country, Mr. Hazard; I suppose you can go where you're a mind to," and with that she gave him such a distracting, bewitching little sidelong look from under her thick, dark lashes that Josiah forgot himself entirely, and a faint little scream from Sally might have given him the idea that she did not like to be kissed, but he did not quite seem to understand it so.

And with that he departed, as sure of Sally as if they had been married a week; for the vanity and self-confidence of a youth like Joe are amazing. Sally was by no means so sure; she returned to her nursing and her anxiety, a little ashamed of herself, and very uncertain as to what she had or had not tacitly promised; and it was not without some indignation that she received by mail, a few days after, a genuine love letter from Joe, and a tiny box with a pearl ring in it, both of which she consigned to the farthest corner of her locked drawer, since the Nancy Beers had sailed, and she could neither answer nor return the epistle or the gift.

Before winter her mother failed to an alarming extent, and by the New Year she was dead. Sally grieved long and deeply, but she was young; the springs of life and hope were still elastic within her; health fortified her spirits, and unacknowledged happiness consoled her; for Joe would keep writing to her tender, manly letters, by every chance he got, — letters that asked for no answer,

but seemed to know her loneliness, understand her need, and bring her help just when and where it was wanted. Before she knew it, Sally Hart found herself "fathoms deep" in love, and when June came and brought Joe with it, there were few preliminaries to be arranged before she consented to wear the pearl ring on her third finger, and to give Joe the promise which he so saucily flung in grandmother Jopp's face.

Sally did not mean to be married right away, but circumstances were too much for her. Joe was to have the post of first mate in a fine new ship in the China trade, owned by his old employers; but his next voyage would be a long one, though he did not sail till September, and he could not leave Sally homeless till such time as he should return; for though she was just now staying with grandma and aunt Lyddy, he knew that the atmosphere in that house was by no means tranquil or cheering, and that Sally was neither mistress of her actions nor her time.

"What's the use, Sally?" pleaded Joe. "You won't have me round but a plaguy small share o' the time, let me be to home all I can fix it. Then if you're settled down to the beach, aunt Lyddy can stay there jest as much as she wants ter. You won't need to be lonesome an hour, either, there's too many Hazards 'nd Tuckers down there to let ye pine for company."

"A hazardous sort of place, is n't it?" asked Sally demurely; but simple-minded Joe did not at


once take the pun. He stared at her with blank eyes, then they suddenly lit up, and a loud laugh followed.

“Ain’t you smart! I say for ’t: Sally, you be a clipper. Mebbe it ’ll be so hazardous you ’ll get tuckered out! There!”

And with a fresh explosion of laughter Joe launched his first and only pun. It took little more persuasion to fetch Sally round to Joe’s wish, so he left her to go home and furbish up the old gray house that had been his father’s. Sally betook herself to her own simple preparations, and the second week in July they were married in grandmother Jopp’s parlor, and went home, aunt Lyddy, with preternatural tact, refusing to go with them, but promising a long visit in September, when Sally would need her more.

A happy couple indeed they were, in more than the conventional term, when they began life together in that old house. Joe had taken Demy Hazard to Boston with him to pick out some chintz for chairs and curtains, and with surprising taste for a longshore girl she had not only selected the pattern and texture, regardless of Joe’s pocket, it must be owned, but she had offered to get up a sewing bee and cover the furniture for him. Joe was such a universal favorite that the clan had already forgiven him for choosing an inland wife, and they all fell to work with zeal, so that when he and Sally alighted from the rickety wagon sent to the station to fetch them, the house stood open and homelike,

and Demy welcomed them at the door, but discreetly slipped away ; while Sally took off her hat and dust-cloak upstairs, and then went over the house hand in hand with Joe. It was an old house, built New England fashion, with two square rooms either side of the front door, a twisted staircase in the narrow entry, and a kitchen behind, off one end of which a bedroom was partitioned, and off the other a big pantry ; there were two bedrooms upstairs, while a long loft or garret under the sloping roof ran from side to side over the kitchen and its end rooms. It is true the furniture was old and quaint ; but Demy had covered the great stuffed sofa with soft, thick cretonne, a gray ground strewn with deep red carnations, and blue sea-pink flowers ; the chairs were re-cushioned with the same stuff, and curtains of it hung before the windows ; there was a dark gray carpet on the floor, with a coral pattern of scarlet in two shades, a red and blue cloth on the round table, where also were gathered Joe's foreign treasures, — a Japanese idol or two, a few shells, one of them holding wild roses in its pink convolutions, a Chinese basket of foreign nuts, and the big family Bible in the midst of all. The room might have looked gaudy but for the low ceiling, the gray walls, the small-paned windows ; but as it was, there was only an aspect of cheer and warmth, and a delicate odor of roses. The other room was all of Joe's ordering ; he had brought its slight bamboo chairs, its settee of the same type, the nests of teapoys, the scarlet and black waiters



that leaned against the wall, even the delicate matting, home in the Nancy Beers; and the dreadful dragons, the puffy mandarins, the toppling pagodas nailed against the wall, relieved one's mind, since they were pictured on rice paper, from a dread of their long and ugly endurance. A corner cupboard held a set of curious China for tea-drinkings, and a few old spoons, quaint enough to match the cups, — this was the summer parlor. The kitchen shone with neatness; the teakettle sung already on the stove, the table was laid for two, and in the pantry good store of fresh bread, yellow butter, cake, berries, and pies, contributed by friendly neighbors, promised more present solace than the ungainly pots of foreign sweetmeats Joe had thought it necessary to provide. It was a simple, clean, cheerful old house, set in the middle of a flat green field, but it seemed a little paradise to these lovers, and the mighty diapason of the sea did not daunt them, for they had each other.

However, when September came, and Josiah had gone, Sally began to feel that there is a price to pay in this world for even natural and honest happiness. She thought she had been lonely before, but what had it been? nothing to this! Poor child! she had not known her own measure, her own possibilities, nor were they yet fully tested.

Aunt Lyddy came on her visit, and had all the news of Baxter at her tongue's end to relate, and then all the hospitalities of the beach to receive and

return ; besides, it was the year's busy season to a housekeeper : Sally had fruit to dry, herbs to gather, apple-sauce to boil down, cranberries to store, her few house-plants to pot for winter companions ; she must see to the potatoes, the carrots, the cabbages, and put down her winter butter. Her deft hand, clear head, and good sense had won approbation and respect already from the housewives of Matoonoc, who were not the most skillful or provident of their kind, but too apt to live like their husbands, sailor fashion, from hand to mouth. But when aunt Lyddy went home, when the bright, still days of October were gone ; the hillsides, that had glowed like fields of blood with red huckleberry leaves, swept bare and gray ; the great swamp turned from a gorgeous mass of gold and purple, scarlet and green, to a low and leafless stretch of misty woodland ; when the splendid sapphire sea became a livid, sweltering ocean beneath a threatening sky, and dashed its sullen anger on the shore, or, lashed by mighty winds, drove its mad tides high in air and far on land, with bits of wreck and naked vessels ; when fogs lay low and deep over land and sea, and the fog-horn from the lighthouse sent its wailing, warning note through the dreary day and night ; then Sally's heart failed her, and she thought she knew what it was to be a sailor's wife !

Thank God, our lives come to us only day by day ! There are a few hours to endure, to work, to fight with dismay, and then there is a respite at

night, — except for those who dream ; and Sally did not dream ; she was too healthy, too practical, too uninjured by trouble or pain to dream ; sleep came to her as the night did, a blessing from heaven, and even the fog-horn ceased to keep her ears or her eyes open after a brief experience. But we who dream, we who rehearse every sorrow in new and ghastlier form ; who recall the dead, with their averted eyes and alien speech, to mock our longing and baffle our grasp ; who predict our coming agonies and rehearse them, as it were, beforehand, even waking with the certainty of grief to come ; or, worst of all, renew in sleep the joys forever lost ; clasp with fond embrace and fervent caresses the little forms that land and sea separate from us ; see face to face, with tender recognition and welcoming kiss, the shape and countenance alienated from us for long, lingering years ; and then, from the keen rapture and joyful surprise, wake to find it all a dream, — *we* know what wear and tear to soul and body mortal suffering can bring, but we, too, thank God that it is to-day's burden only we have to bear, and not to-morrow's ; that we are taught and accustomed to pray only for our daily bread.

So day by day the winter wore away for Sally. She had her work to do, which helped her, as work always does ; she had a chicken-coop behind her woodshed, and the fluttering inmates amused and occupied her somewhat ; the neighbors were very friendly ; she had a comfortable, pleasant home,

and little care; and with unconscious philosophy she comforted herself, thinking how much worse off she might be, — thoughts which are wonderfully consoling to all of us, if we can only think them!

Once or twice she heard from Joe, and more often she wrote to him, hoping some of her letters might reach him, much as she might hope a dry leaf, wind-whirled through space, would alight on any given shore; but still she wrote. Spring brought her the comfort of outdoor life, the cheer of springing grass, of budding trees, of soft winds and showers, of work in her garden, and new life in broods of bright-eyed chicks, fluffy yellow goslings, and queer little waddling ducks. She loved pets, from the cross old cat she had imported from Baxter and waited on all winter, to the neighbor's droning horse that carried her to and fro to the occasional meeting, or to get the semi-weekly mail. She wished in her secret heart, with all the shy fervor of a young and childless wife, that Heaven would send her a little child of her own, to share her solitary, longing life, and make it blessed; and for want of such a grant she loved all little living things, and felt hope bud and blossom in her heart as the spring went on and the birds came, and all things grew in life and strength; for the dear words of our Lord came back from Nature's interpreting, — "if He so care for these," and it seemed to her clear as a special revelation that Joe would also be cared for and returned to her safely.

Yet it was a long year and a long voyage. Sum-

mer came and went, and aunt Lyddy with it, but the *Clio* did not appear in Boston Bay; hope grew sick, and faith almost despaired, till, in the middle of October, Joe came in one day to the still, clean kitchen, and put his arms round Sally, who had heard his step coming up the path, but in a very agony of joy could not rise to meet him.

“Only one month!”

Sally looked into Joe’s eyes two weeks after his coming with a look of pain and surprise hard to bear.

“Well, Sally! I wish to mercy I could help it. Bless you, my little girl, what in thunder would you do ef I was a whalin’ cap’en? three years a voy’ge, an’ mebbe seven; I’ve knowed it so to be.”

“Do! I’d go with you” —

“Ho! ho! ho! go with me! I’m blest if you would, dear; a whaler ain’t no place for women-folks, now I tell ye. Ef I was only owner of the *Clio* you could go along, easy; but a whaler! my eye! how do you think you’d stan’ tryin’ out?”

“But only a month, Joe?” Sally recurred with feminine persistence.

“That’s the record, Sally, sure’s you live.”

And seeing she could not help it, she resolved to be as cheerful and sweet as she could while her husband did stay; she could cry and fret afterward. She had her reward.

“The good Lord bless ye, little woman,” said Joe, in a very husky voice, as he held her tight in his arms, trying to say good-by under difficulties.

“You’ve made it fair weather and easy sailin’ for me ever sence I come home, an’ you might ha’ laid an entire different course, a sight easier, too; but it’s allers ben sunshine an’ fair winds, though ’t was much as ever you could handle the ship. I shall think on ’t heaps o’ times a-keepin’ watch, fair or foul, I tell ye.”

Before Sally could speak he was gone, leaving her heart in a glow, heavy as the parting was.

This second year was not so hard for Sally, and when the *Clio* reached Canton there was a letter sent her that made her laugh and cry too, for it ran in this fashion : —

MY DEER SALLY, — Here we be, safe to Chiny, after a kind of a dull voyage, never sightin’ nothin’ nor nobody so’s to hail ’em, save an’ except a Britisher, whereby I sent you a letter, but like enough this’ll get to you first. Also we had trouble aboard. Cap’en Green he fell down the hatchway one mornin’; well, I don’t say he need to, I dono’s he did, and I dono *as* he did, but when a man crooks his elbow pootty often, and afore breakfast too, why, he’s liable to trip over cables and sech, and I don’t think he’s more’n too fit to boss a vessel, which I never told you nothing about for fear you might get oneasy; but the end on’t is he had suthin’ on the brain or in it, an’ he lay a-ravin’ an’ a-tearin’ a month, and then he up an’ died two weeks afore we made port, so’t I’m yours to command, — Cap’en Hazard as sure as you live!

P. S. You can go along next v'yage ef you want to.

Your very luvving husband, JOE.

When the letter got to Sally she knew very well she could go no voyages with Joe; there was another future before her, and one she by no means quarreled with, but fully meant to keep secret from him, actuated by the same reason that had kept him from telling her how incapable a captain commanded the *Clio* when she last sailed out of Boston.

Time went faster now. Early spring brought aunt Lyddy, eager to help and full of interest, and the first of July actually saw grandmother Jopp "lighting down," as old ballads have it, from the station-master's wagon at Sally's door, in company with an obsolete hair trunk and a big band-box much the worse for the wear and tear of baggage-masters and travel.

There was much bustle and sharp stir of preparation now in the old gray house; store of tiny garments fluttering in the hot sun, and skillfully ironed by aunt Lyddy after their due bleaching. Grandma took charge of the poultry, and harried them to and fro till hens remonstrated, and geese came to open war, whenever her slat sunbonnet appeared out of doors. In short, the dynasty of the tranquil gray house was changing, and when on the second anniversary of Sally's wedding-day a pair of sturdy, splendid boys appeared, the kingdom capitulated at once, and was given over to its double monarchy.

If ever there was a happy woman in the world it was Sally Hazard ; she had not even the speck in her joy of Joe's absence, for she pleased herself, lying quiet in the still, cool chamber, with thinking how much anxiety his ignorance had spared him, how delicious his surprise would be to find such a welcome when he came home. So she lay there and watched her babies, worshiping them with an undisguised fondness that scared grandmother Jopp, but in obedience to tradition she treated Sally with great respect and tenderness, though it was mighty irksome to her soul to do so.

"Land o' liberty, Lyddy!" she exclaimed one morning, as she came into the kitchen fresh from a pitched battle with the geese, who would eat the chickens' food, and the belligerent old rooster, who would fight them to his own destruction. "I'm tired o' mixin' and mussin'! I wished ter gracious Sally'd git raound agin. I've ben a-goin' delicately, like that old cretur in the Bible, 'bout as long as I can stan' it, a-whishin' here, an' a-hushin' there, and a-steppin' tippy-toe till my legs ache. I'd give two cents for a firecracker, jest to hear somethin' pop an' done with 't. I'm so tired of that everlastin' swash the water keeps up, an' that everlastin' 'Hush' you keep up."

Aunt Lyddy flared up in a weakly way:—

"Why, mother Jopp! you do beat all! You know Sally must be kep' quiet, now don't ye?"

"Well, I s'pose so, but I tell ye I'm a goin' to stop till she's outdoor agin and pootty well smarted

up, 'n' then I 'm a-goin' to free my mind to her, you 'd better b'lieve!" with which threat she strode once more into the ranks of greedy gèese, and sent terror and dispersion into their souls by means of an old broom and a ragged apron wildly beating the air.

Poor Sally! only two weeks after, she sat in the summer parlor watching her precious babies asleep in either end of a long cradle she had found stored away in the garret, a relic of previous twins in the Hazard family, when grandma Jopp came in.

"Are n't they lovely, grandma?" she began; just see how soft those little arms are, like satin; and such pretty dimples on their hands; are n't their heads lovely, too, so smooth and round, and such mites of curls. I don't believe anybody in the world ever saw such babies."

"Sally, don't be a fool!" was the rapid retort; "there's ben heaps of babies in the world afore, a sight harnsomer than them little puckered things; 'n' I tell you what you 're a-makin' idols on 'em; you love 'em too much, you jest worship 'em! they'll be took away from you awful quick, you see ef they ain't!"

"I don't believe it, grandma." Sally's eyes blazed, and her cheeks burned with maternal fury. "I don't believe mothers can love their children too much; if they don't love 'em, how can they take care of them day and night, sick or well, tired or not? I believe the Lord gave them to me to love.

He ain't afraid I'll over-love them; He won't take them away for that, I know. I'd be ashamed to think so hard of Him!"

"Why, Sary Hazard; ain't you kinder profane? 'Pears as if you thought you was dredful intimate with the Lord's ways."

"Well, I know He is good," snapped Sally, with an unspoken doubt in her heart as to grandma's own qualifications of that sort; and then aunt Lyddy, hearing her mother's excited tones, came in and intimated war among the poultry, and beguiled the officious old lady from her post; and the next day she went back to Baxter.

Sally did not stint her babies of love; she took them into her heart as she did into her arms, with close and warm folding. Their gentle baby breath lulled her to sleep; she woke again and again to be sure of them, to spread their coverings straight, to turn them on another side for coolness, to kiss with soft passion the calm brows untraced by thought or care; and then she slept again, like one who wakes from a happy dream and sleeps again more happily finding it is a waking truth. But she neither neglected her household nor weakly coddled her children. A young girl came to help her when aunt Lyddy left, and to her Sally delegated the housework while she took her babies out in the air, one on either arm, in the fresh autumn days, or put them to sleep in an old hammock, hung from two small trees by the shed door. The babies grew and thrived as babies will, and by November Sally

began to make ready for Joe ; but the month went on and on without him. Other vessels that had sailed since the *Clio* began to come in, and in answer to Sally's questions the owners of the vessel could only reply that they had news of her leaving port on the proper day, but none farther. Slowly the year fell into its latter days, but brought no more tidings. Sally was anxious, but all the shore people flocked to reassure her, and her courage did not fail. Granny Tucker, the wise woman of the clan, had found and worked the key to the poor little mother's nature.

"Keep your heart up, Sally," the bent and wrinkled old creature said ; "I've come to see ye a good two mile jest to say that, keep your heart up ; them babies 'll pine away as sure as ye don't ; keep 'em pleasant 'an you keep 'em well ; bitter vittles ain't good for nobody, leastest of all for babies, and them little critters is dreadful close to the ma ; they're too little to know better. You're jest as good as God to them, an' how'd you feel ef the Lord above darkened his face to folks ? You keep round ; Joe 'll turn up yet all right. Hazards don't drown in water, now I tell ye ; they're a lucky lot."

And Sally was fortified more by this quaint advice than by all her own faith or sense, for it went to the heart of her heart, and flourished. It was a wonder to everybody how she kept strong and bright all that weary winter, and how the babies grew. If anybody hinted that Joe was lost, she

resented it like an insult. Grandma Jopp sent her a letter of condolence and pious quotations, mixed with a great deal of complacent "I told ye so," and with it an old crape bonnet and veil of her own, laid aside as good as new, which Sally returned, with the letter inside, by the very next train, after a burst of angry tears, but with no answer or acknowledgment.

Spring came, but no word from Joe. If Sally's heart sank she did not show it to the public; she fought her own battles in secret for her babies' sake, and rushed out from under the accumulating fears and doubts that threatened to crush her, to that safe fold of love her darlings inhabited, seeking rest and strength from their rosy brave faces, their clinging arms, their soft lips at her bosom, their shining heads upon her breast, and never seeking in vain. They grew in the keen salt air and broad sunshine, with incredible vigor, their great dark eyes were bright and calm, their dimpled cheeks flushed with health, their voices sweet as the bird-voices in the woods, and by the time their birthday came they were able to run about the house, to stand at Sally's knee, to call the "papa" they had never seen, to mimic the dog, the cat, the chickens. Their growth and forwardness were the wonder of all the beach, and every man, woman, and child loved Sally's babies, for by this time they all knew Joe was dead. But Sally never gave in.

"When be you going to wean them great children?" remonstrated aunt Lyddy.

"When Joe comes home," was the quiet answer. "I want them to be babies till he gets here."

"Oh, Sally!" whimpered Mrs. Lydia, moved to tears.

"Aunt Lyddy, stop! Joe is n't — dead!" the word came out with an effort. "He's coming back. I know he is. It's no use for you to cry about it. I'm the one to cry, if I did n't know better. Babies, call papa!" and with a tiny, ringing shout the unconscious creatures uttered the name they could not understand.


"There!" laughed Sally defiantly; "he'll come to hear *that*, aunt Lyddy!" and the woman half believed her.

But the babies called in vain; the summer passed with no response. Autumn mocked the dying year again with idle splendors and elusive mists of glory; the frost nipped sharply all earth's tender things; the north wind sounded its awful trumpet and hurled wild defiance at the surging sea; light showers of snow drifted across the blue distance, and dropped their chill plumage on the earth, only to fade in dew in that salt air. It was November, — it was Thanksgiving, and Sally, returned from dinner at uncle Samuel Hazard's, where the twins had been the pride and delight of the day, sat alone by the dying kitchen fire; for her girl had gone home to her own people, to celebrate the festival, and the babies lay sound asleep upstairs in their mother's bed, hugging the spoils of the day that zealous cousins had heaped upon them: rag dollies,

bright balls of worsted, knitted reins to drive the rocking-chairs by, all lay in their arms or scattered about the white coverlet. The beautiful curly heads, the dark-lashed eyes, the red lips, the dimpled arms, were all at rest, and Sally had left them at last to think her own thoughts beside the embers. Her weary hands were clasped about her knees, and with drooping head and eyes, dim with coming tears, fixed on the flickering blaze, she sat there in the quaint old settle a picture to make one's heart ache: longing, wearying, agonizing for the one presence that could alone make the day a real Thanksgiving to her hungry heart, and praying with a certain desperation for Joe's return. She heard yet did not notice the swing of the little gate, the soft sand-muffled steps she should have known. A hand on the latch roused her; she started up to see the door open, — to find herself in Joe's arms!

It was a long time before she asked one question, had one thought but that Joe was there; and when at last she roused to make a few inquiries, it proved to be the old story, the sailor story that has broken so many hearts with grief or joy, — tempest, shipwreck, peril, rescue, and late restoration; but Sally was impatient of detail.

"Joe!" she cried, between tears and laughing, looking a very girl again, with quick blushes on her fair face, "Joe, it is Thanksgiving Day, and you have had no feast; come upstairs, and put away these worn rags for your Sunday suit, and I'll get your supper."



“Jest as if it would n’t ha’ been Thanksgiving to me to-day ef ’t was July, Sally. But I am kinder sharp-set, I allow. I’ve driv all day to git here, and had only jest a bite to a tavern.”

But Sally was half-way up the stairs, and Joe, wondering at her unusual particularity about his dress, followed her to the bedside of his babies.

A long breath heaved his great chest ; he looked at them, then at Sally, and fell on his knees at the bedside, and hid his face in the pillow without a word. It was the triumph of keen emotion over the reticent New England temperament, but only the triumph of a moment ; he lifted his head and looked at Sally, who stood crying and smiling like a rainbow, and a gleam of humor lit his suspiciously shining eyes as he spoke.

“’T ain’t fair to double up things on a feller so, Sally ! One Thanksgivin’ was all I could steer : two on ’em’s agin chart an’ compass. I vow ef I ain’t shipwrecked agin ! ”

But years after, when other children climbed to his arms or leaned against his knees, there was no story they liked to hear or he loved to tell so well as the story of his “Double Thanksgiving.”

HOME AGAIN.

“WHY can’t you stay to home, Joseph, and work the farm just as father done before ye?”

“Well, for one thing, mother, I don’t hanker to work myself into an old man before my time, an’ live on pork and potatoes like a Paddy.”

Mrs. Gillett sighed. She was a thin, sad-eyed woman of forty-five, who had worked herself almost to death, and lived all the time on pork, potatoes, and pie, the triad of dyspeptic demons that rule in New England kitchens; and she had no desires beyond her round. She did want to keep her boy at home to be company and help to her; he was her first-born, and now the only child of his mother: the other seven filled tiny graves under the daisies and sorrel in Clinton churchyard.

Her husband had died of a sunstroke in the corn-field two years ago. He never made a will; so only a third of his personal property came to her: one third of a silver watch, one unbleached shirt, a egg and a third of his pantaloons, — for he had two pair, — two out of six chairs, and so on, for his ‘personals’ were few and poor. Joe got house and land. But she could trust her boy, and she looked forward to a calm, eventless life in his house, thinking to knit his stockings, tend his babies, make and

mend for his wife, till she herself should go to her place with her dead. Joseph, however, was of a different mind ; he was young and ambitious. To this time he had not made any definite plans for himself ; only fretted over his barren acres, his toil in frost and sun, his monotonous food, made palatable only by hunger and outdoor labor, and his longing to be and do something better than his father had been or done. A night or two before our story begins he had met an old schoolmate at the village "store," — grand resort of all the men near enough to make it a place for exchange of gossip, and that opinionated wrangle of ideas so precious to the heart of every true American, — and there Harry Jenks had boasted loudly of his place in New York, and displayed on his handsome person such clothes, such jewelry, and such glazed and astonishing linen that Joe's patched and rustic garments seemed to hurt him physically with the sharp sense of humiliating contrast ; but it was not the brilliant aspect of this butterfly alone that struck Joseph ; he was bewitched with the picture his former friend drew of the daily excitements and nightly amusements of city life ; his brain reeled with the ferment of new thoughts, his life seemed dull and stagnant as the water of the ditch that drained his swamp lots ; and before he left the store with his jug of molasses and bag of meal he asked Harry to look out for a place for him in New York. He had been "the best hand at figgers" in his school, and a sturdy honesty and common sense underlay this

talent, fitting him by nature for the life of a business man, though dormant within him lay a warm and generous heart, and a repressed enthusiasm that must be still kept dormant if he expected success. It was of no use for his mother to offer her feeble arguments to his strong determination; she felt this as she saw the look of uneasiness and contempt with which he spoke of his life and labor. With womanly instinct she brought another motive to bear.

“Does Cornelye know you’re goin’?”

Joe flushed to the roots of his dark hair. “No,” he said sharply, “not yet.”

“I don’t b’lieve she’ll like it,” the poor woman judiciously added.

Joe’s face hardened. “Then she’ll have to do ’other thing.” With which ungracious speech he went out of the kitchen door to the barn.

Cornelia Marvin was a delicate, gentle girl who had been brought up in Clinton, where she had been born, and left a solitary orphan. Joe Gillett had known her from his early childhood, and had drifted naturally enough into “keeping company” with her as they grew older. Cornelia clung to him with every fibre of her innocent, honest heart, and she accepted the homage with contented complacency, but rather as a matter of course than with the vivid, ardent passion of a man for his true love and future wife. No form of words had ever been uttered between them; they passed for lovers in the village gossip; and who could see the girl’s

great shy hazel eyes upturned to Joseph, the color coming and going in her cheek like the reflection of a wild rose in the brook it overhangs, without reading in nature's own lovely language the story of her heart? But all this was a trivial matter to Joe when his future called him. He might marry Nely some time, but at present there was his fortune to make, and he was glad that no pledge of speech or letter had ever given form to the idea of their engagement: he was a free man. Yet he did not like to tell her of his plans; he left the news to drift about till it reached her; and but that she grew paler, and dismissed school at three o'clock one day because she had a dreadful headache, she made no sign. Women do grow pale and have the headache for a thousand reasons, and who can tell whether it is indignation or heart-break?

Joe shook hands with her on Sunday, after church, and said, "Good-by, Cornelye. I s'pose you have heard I'm going to York into a bank?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, smiling. "I hope you'll do great things, Joseph." And that was all.

Tommy Hymny, as he was nicknamed, an odd character who served as chorus to all the village tragedies and comedies, hobbled up just as they parted.

"Dew tell! goin' to York, be ye now?"

'Mid scenes of confusion an' cretur complaints,'"

he quavered out in his cracked voice. "Well, well,

well ! 't ain't more 'n a few Sabba' days sence I remember ye a-toddlin' to meetin' in petticoats 'long of yer ma : —

'The creturs, look how old they grow,
How old they grow, how old they grow,
The creturs, look how old they grow —
An' wait their fi'ry doo-oo-oom ! '

[I guess you won't have to wait for it long down to York, 'cordin' to the tell. 'T is pretty nigh to the gates of the oncomfortable place, to speak within bounds like."

" I guess not quite so bad as that, Uncle Tommy," said Joe with a laugh. " Harry Jenks ain't gone to the bad yet."

" I dono," said the old man sadly. " He's got time enough yit; the bad way's dre'dful smooth at first.

' Broad is the road that leads to death,
An' thousands walk together there;
But wisdom shows a narrer path,
With here an' there a traveler.' "

Sung to the lugubrious old tune of " Windham," something in words or measure gave Joe a sort of spiritual chill; he turned away hurriedly from Tommy Hymny, who certainly had justified his nickname, and sought for Cornelia with a blind instinct, longing for some friendly look or word; but her lithe and slender figure was far in the distance, and Joe turned homeward a little daunted at the lonely outlook, glad to be once more by his mother's side. No such feeling staid with him long, however; and

soon as supper was over he said to his mother, "Well, I 've settled everything for ye so far as I can. Deacon Hills will do well by the farm, and what you don't want of the produce he 'll sell for ye, and uncle 'Lias will haul to mill 'long of his corn whatever you want to grind, and Tommy Hymny 'll split and saw the wood, and see to such chores as you want him *to* see to ; but I ain't really easy in my mind about your bein' here alone."

"Well, Joe, I don't expect I shall be alone. I want to get settled to your bein' gone for a spell, an' then I 'll surely have somebody ; there's women-folks enough 'round that 'll be glad to have their board for their comp'ny, an I 'll let ye know right off when I 'm suited with one."

"I 'most wish you 'd take old Tommy in ; he 'd be a sight of help."

"For mercy's sakes ! Why, I could n't stan' it noway. Men-folks have to be mended an' made for, an' they 're always masterful an' notional, particular an old bach like him ; an' I could n't never stan' his singin' hymns like an old cracked hurdy-gurdy, mornin', noon, an' night, whenever he see fit."

"That is some nooisance, I allow. I wonder how he fell into 't ?"

"Oh, he had a half-crazy kind of a aunt that fetched him up, an' she learnt him the hull hymn book through, so it come nateral to him to say it when 't was fittin', jest as some folks kote Scriptor for every airthly thing, an' he was a real good

inger in his young days, so he got sort of used o words an' tuues together, besides likin' real well o hear the sound of his voice. Folks give him his nickname years ago. I dono as he reelly knows by this time whether his hymns be said or sung, or whether his name is Hymny or Hin-nan."

Joe yawned over the explanation, and sauntered upstairs to pack his old valise. His mother's heart was running over with tender counsel and motherly warning, but something in Joe's cool eye and care-less manner shut her lips; she could only carry her burden to the feet of her Master, and leave it there for a power transcending even maternal love to lift and bear it instead of her faltering strength.

So Joe went to "York" the next day, and before the week was over Cornelia Marvin had come to board with Mrs. Gillett, having no home of her own, and being only too glad to leave the family with whom she had hitherto lived for the peace and sweetness and unspoken sympathy of Joe's mother and the shelter of Joe's home. Old Tommy performed his daily duties with faithfulness, and added to his service scraps of song and bits of consolation that the widow could well have spared; but she bore with them for the sake of his really kind heart. So her days went on in creeping quiet, disturbed only by a rare letter from Joe, who was not used to correspondence, and did not like it.

"Heered from Joseph, hev ye, Mis' Gillett?" was the daily question Tommy asked her; and when

a long time went by between her affirmative answers, he shook his head sadly, and went off wailing out, to the tune of "China," —

"Why dew we mo'rn deeparted frien's?"

much as if he were celebrating a funeral service.

Joseph, however, had found his element in the great city. The lowest clerk in the bank where Harry Jenks had found him a place, he devoted himself to his work so thoroughly and intelligently that he soon drew upon himself the notice of those above him. He unlearned the phrases of his country speech, and spoke like the rest of his companions. He saved and spared till a city-cut suit of clothes replaced the Sunday garments he had worn at home. He looked no longer like a rustic, yet not the least like a fop, and he worked with a good will and intent purpose; spent no money on amusements, but studied in his solitary evenings everything that could help him in his business, and went to bed with a sound conscience and a cold heart, — sure narcotics for any man.

It had been Mrs. Gillett's one hope and thought that Joe should come home to Thanksgiving the first time that festival came round after he left her. She had made her simple preparations for the day early. Tommy Hymny had provided the vegetables that she had not raised herself, and brought her the very biggest squash for her pies that ever grew in Clinton.

"Look a-here," he said, as he struggled up to the

back door, carrying the great straw-colored fruit in his arms. "Did y' ever see sech a skosh as this here? I swow to man it beats time. Well, 't ain't none too good for Thanksgivin Day pies, an' I'll bet a cookey Joe never see nothin' so good down to York. 'T is kinder good to hev him comin' back.

' Who shall describe the jo-oys that rise
Through all the courts o' paradise
To se-e-e a prodigal re-e-turn ! '

Well, I don' know as I had ought to call him a prodigal ; he ain't one o' thet sort. I had ought to have broke off with line second. Deacon Hills is a-goin' to send over the turkey to-morrer, an' I'll kill them two chickens to-night for the pie, an' — Why, Cornelye Marvin, where be ye goin' ? "

"Up to Putney, to keep Thanksgiving with an old schoolmate, Uncle Tommy," answered a sweet, steady voice, and a pale, sad countenance smiled at the good old soul, whose broad face was agape with surprise.

"Well, of all things ! I s'pose you thought two was comp'ny an' three's a crowd. Dreadful thoughtful women-folks be ; but sometimes they're a leetle mite too much ser. I bet Joe would n't ha' thought *you'd* make a crowd, anyhow."

The stage drove up just in time to spare Cornelia from answering, except by the vivid blush that made her thin cheeks glow, and with one more good-by to the widow, who understood her too well to ask her to stay, the lonely girl left her home before the one home-day of all our New England

world. But the same stage brought a brief, plausible letter from Joe. He could not come back so soon, he said. Being the youngest clerk in the bank, he did not like to ask a holiday, and the journey would be expensive.

The widow Gillett sold her turkey and her squash, and ate her meagre meal in bitterness of soul, with no Thanksgiving story or song in her lonely heart. Uncle Tommy's condolence was in vain, being of that pungent and counter-irritant sort common to his race.

"Well, well, well! so he ain't a-comin'? Beats all. I expect you sot your heart on't too much. Disapp'intment is good for pussonal piety, though. Some like med'cine. Mabbe you've made a idle of Joseph, Mis' Gillett, an' so Providence is a-takin' ye to do for't.

'The dearest idle I-I hev kno-own,
Whate'er thet i-idle be-e,'"

he quavered, casting up his eyes to the ceiling as he went on; but when the verse was over, and he looked round complacently for his hearer, she had gone, and shaking his head mournfully, he took up the swill pail and departed.

Mrs. Gillett sent no word of reproach to Joe. She had a dim instinct that he preferred not to come home, and a certain healthy pride of character forbade her to urge him to a distasteful duty merely for her own pleasure. She began to understand from his rare letters that he was growing into a higher place than his mother's home or heart; his

language was of another style than the rustic utterance she still used, and his talk was of stocks and shares, of pressing business and astounding successes. Year after year passed by, and still he did not come home to Thanksgiving, and ceased even to excuse himself. Now and then a handsome present came to his mother, — heavy silk for a dress, winter furs, soft shawls, or warm slippers; and while he was duly thanked for them, they were always packed away in the old camphor chest that had kept moths at bay all his mother's life, and neither worn nor looked at.

"Why don't you wear your nice warm things, aunt Serena?" asked Cornelia, during one bitter winter.

"I can't, dear," said the patient voice of the widow. "I conceit somehow that they wouldn't warm me none. I'd rather set eyes on Joseph than hev all the furs and things under the hull canopy."

Cornelia turned away to hide her overflowing eyes.

But Joe, meantime, was drinking a full cup of success; the ten years that had already whitened his mother's brown hair and changed the slight, sweet girl Cornelia into a grave woman with a firm, rounded figure, and serious, tender face, full of thought and feeling, had transformed Joe still more. He had given every power of his life to the acquisition of money, and his iron will had bent circumstances to his favor, and grasped every occasion or

possibility of gain ; the fleeting fancy of his youth, the dark-eyed maiden who had done him homage, had faded from his inner as well as his outer vision. He laid dollar on dollar aside till some sure investment presented itself, and then, after a certain hoard had accumulated, began to speculate. His clear head and retentive memory helped him to an almost marvelous insight into the possibilities of the Stock Exchange, and his money returned to him again and again, doubled and redoubled, till he was almost a rich man ; and then, driven by that greed which grows more greedy with each new gain, that devil's hunger and thirst which warps and degrades the human soul like a hidden sin, he married for money.

Miss Adelaide Snyder was an orphan with two millions in her own right, and being long past her girlhood, and always distrusting such friends and lovers as approached her, because she felt in her narrow soul they must be after her money and not her, she at last was unfortunate enough to fall madly in love with Mr. Gillette, the handsome banker, who had put another letter on to his father's old-fashioned name, and given its last syllable the heavy accent so much more "stylish" than that which affiliated it with "billet" and "skillet." Joseph Gillett had indeed developed into a much handsomer man than even his mother had expected ; good food had furnished him with abundant muscle, and the early and long walks taken to his business, in order to save car-fare, had preserved his health.

Dissipation had not tempted him ; he was too busy to play ; and he dressed well always, being keen enough to perceive at once that a prosperous aspect beckons and allures prosperity, to seem successful being half success with the world of men. There was no mistaking Miss Snyder's sentiments toward Joseph ; she was not especially shy or wanting in self-appreciation ; she understood and respected Joseph's passion for money, and lavished her smiles and attentions upon him with a serene confidence that her red hair and sharp features, her lean, angular figure and graceless aspect, would be unseen in the glitter of her diamonds and the glow of her gold.

It was a brief courtship. Joe had not been used to linger over any of his speculations, and he made no delay about this. They were to sail at once for Europe, and buy the trousseau in Paris, and he had only time to send his mother a paper with the short announcement of his marriage, and a postal card to tell her of his sudden departure for another land. He did not once think of asking her to his wedding ; it was a mere business arrangement in his mind, and he knew very well what scorn would light up Miss Snyder's prominent green eyes at sight of the homely, humble little woman who was to be her mother-in-law.

But the news came like a blow on Mrs. Gillett. Deep in her heart still burned the hope that after he was rich Joseph would come back and marry Cornelia, who had grown nearer and dearer to her

with each year, and the patient woman's thoughts would wander from her monotonous knitting, and weave for themselves tender motherly dreams of a house full of clinging children, a chair by her son's fireside, an old age of honor and loving tendance, and a renewal of her own motherhood in Joseph's and Cornelia's offspring.

Now this was over. She felt with almost the certainty of knowledge that her son's wife would be no comfort to her, perhaps even ashamed of her. She understood with a sharp emotion of regret why she had not been asked to Joseph's marriage; but the regret was more for her boy than herself. And a sharper pang yet was added when she perceived that Cornelia paled and grew silent for many a long week.

Tommy Hymny alone received the news in an appropriate spirit.

"You don't say our Joseph's reely married. Hallylooyer! hallylooyer! hallylooyer! Amen. Well, well! a York gal too. Rich as mud, I s'pose, an' pootier 'n a pictur. Sech is life, Mis' Gillett. Some folks hez the pertaters an' some the parin's; 'tis his'n to get the old 'riginal roots, b'iled an' skinned an' buttered, an' I've got the skins. But land! I sorter like skins; they're hullsome. So Joe's married:—

'Blest be-e the tie-ie that binds.'

That's so. Well, I'd sort o' consated that Cornelye an' him would hitch hosses for the traviled

road o' this world, but 't wa'n't so to be. Man proposes an' the Lord disposes, they say. P'r'aps he did n't propose, though, thet is, to Cornelye. Anyway, I expect he 's got a good un;" and Tommy struck up, to the solemn rhythm of "Old Hundred," —

“ ‘ O may this pair increasin' find
Substan-shill playsures of the mind;
Happee too-gether may they be,
An' both united ' —

Darn it! I've forgot the rest. I don't put into 't reel often. This town's consider'ble like heaven: the' ain't much marryin' an' givin' in marriage here.”

And having thus cackled his congratulations, Tommy walked off to the barn.

Another cloud seemed now to have settled on the Gillett house; both Cornelia and aunt Serena went about softly, as did Agag of old, feeling that the bitterness of life was upon them afresh. The two women grew pitifully tender of each other, and perhaps their daily work and duties were all that saved them from that settled melancholy which sometimes unfits the strongest mind for its earthly existence.

Meanwhile Joseph was enjoying himself, in a certain fashion, abroad. If he soon found out that his wife was jealous, selfish, and exacting, he set that down to the loss account of his bargain against the two millions solid gain; and if sometimes there arose beside the gaunt and unlovely

figure of this bride in priceless costumes and jewels the delicate outlines of a girl with dark melancholy eyes full of love and sorrow, in a calico gown and white apron, the sigh he involuntarily uttered was followed by a little expletive of scorn, due entirely to the aforesaid calico and cambric, for his heart was yet hardened. Some new and successful speculations in foreign stocks kept him busy, and Mrs. Gillette amused herself with operas and balls. She too had found out that Joseph was by no means the lover or the husband she had expected, but she was woman of the world enough to accept the situation and make the best of it.

So ten years more rolled by. One puny baby had been born of this heartless union, and died after an hour of fluttering life. In all this time Joe had seen his mother but twice: once when he brought home the baby body to lay it beside his father in the old churchyard; and his heart seemed open again toward his mother and his home; he sat by her once more in the time-worn but unchanged kitchen, and saw how years and longing had turned her hair to bands of snow, and lined her face with the fine script of grief in a thousand delicate etchings. He was welcomed by Tommy Hymny, decrepit, but unfaltering in his quaver: —

“Deary me! so this is Joe! Mister Gillett, I expect. How you hev growed! And fetched your babe hum to the cemet’ry for to rest beside your folks. Well, well! it beats all! I’ve felt for ye, Joseph. I hev, quite a little. Providence hain’t

gifted me with no children, — nor no wife, for the matter o' that ; but I've bore up under 't ; less hev, less lose, ye know ; and I ain't never one to say, Why do ye so ? to Providence ; I've kinder squirmed along, as you may say, and hed my own troubles, but ye know, —

'Not fro-om the du-u-ust affli-hic-tions rise,
Nor trou-u-ubles co-o-ome by chance.'

Goes real good to 'St. Martin's,' that does — seems to kinder sob. Well, well ; good-by to ye, Joseph ; be good, an' you 'll be happy ; mabbe not jest here, but there 's t' other world, ye know."

This was just what the rich banker did *not* know practically, but he went back to his splendid home and his pining, disappointed wife, with Tommy's odd phrases ringing in his ears, soon, however, to be forgotten in the renewed rush for the wealth that was no longer a blessing to him, but only the minister of a mad and degrading greed for more gold. Yet neither his mother nor his mother's God had forgotten this prodigal, who so filled himself with husks. Near the end of this last ten years a man whom he had trusted with the blindest confidence failed, as men will fail, to deserve that trust ; embezzlement, flight, panic, falling houses, all dragged down by this false dependence on another, one here and another there, like the outlying compartments of a card palace, going down with shame and despair.

It is an old story, ever new, but sad as it is old ; the millionaire of to-day may be the beggar of to-

morrow, and his trust in uncertain riches once gone, what is left to him ?

“Crumble it — and what comes next ?
Is it God ? ”

And there were added to this loss others, contingent on it, that left Joseph Gillett a solitary man. The shock of ruin killed his wife as surely as any death-dealing bullet ; and not her only, for with her passing soul went out another, the yet untried spirit of a new-born child, long desired, eagerly looked for, as the heir and increaser of this money that had proved but fairy gold. To say that the ruined banker mourned his wife would be a mere politeness, but he did bitterly grieve for the child he had so earnestly wished might give a new hope and reason to his own existence ; and when he found himself almost penniless, after he had laid mother and child to rest in the gorgeous suburban grave-yard, where long since he had erected the most exquisite monument of its vast collection, he remembered, like the echo of a past life, Tommy Hymny's quaint phrase, “ There 's t' other world, ye know.”

He had lingered behind the funeral train, sending his carriage back empty, and seated himself on a little hillock to watch the filling of the grave that held the two tenants, when the odd words came back to him. The low sun struck across the shorn and verdant grass at his feet, the sad, sweet odors of late autumn filled the soft air, and above the suggestive chamber in that emerald turf rose, on a high and simple pedestal, the shape of a colossal

oman, holding in her dropped hand a slight cross hat lay against her side, and with the other pointing upward, while her face, radiant with trust and expectation, yet calm with sure and certain hope, looked away from and over all the graves beneath her to the far eastern hills, as if she hailed beyond them the advent morning, and returned in her eyes the light of his coming who is the Resurrection and the Life. That exalted look of serene rapture fell like a spell on the arid and rocky heart of Joseph Millett; his losses and sorrows vanished for the moment; that other world drew near and enveloped him in its glory; his flesh and spirit quailed before the suggestion of that glad aspect; some old words heard in his childhood rose up to his confusion: "Who shall abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth?" and before their awful utterance his soul shrank and dwindled as in the very presence of a neglected and forgotten Master asking for the talents intrusted to his unfaithful servant. It was almost as if the grave gave up its dead, this arising of the blinded and besotted soul at the word of the Lord; but it was a true resurrection, for after a long hour of deep and torturing conflict within himself, he rose up, leaving his dead behind him, with the old repentant sentence on his lips, though man never heard it spoken, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

And it happened to him, as before, that his Fa-

ther saw him a great way off, and had compassion on him.

No temptation offered him to return to his business career had after this any tempting in it. To the last dollar his money went to pay all that he owed, and was barely sufficient to set him free; but his creditors were merciful, and accepted what they could get graciously, knowing very well that this, the chief sufferer, was not the chief sinner, who had at the first alarm put wide seas between him and the danger of losing the proceeds of his treason.

It was hardly a grief to the widow Gillett to hear of Joseph's losses; her maternal instinct long ago had convinced her that he was not happy with his wife, and she knew that his money had built up a wall of separation between her boy and herself. There was almost a smile on her sweet old face as she told Tommy, when he came tottering into the house with a basket of apples, the story of failure and poverty that had befallen Joseph.

"Good Jericho! you don't say it? Why, I thought he was rollin' in gold, Mis' Gillett. Well, well! 't is the root of all evil, sartin, — leastways the love on 't is. I have sorter noticed, though, that folks don't seem to think so. Ain't it onsartin stuff?

' Riches take 'em wings a-and fly;
Time sha-all soon this airth remove.'

That's so, and mabbe 't is for the best; most things is. I have n't never hed no trouble with

money, an' I 'm a'most through, without it, praise
e to thanks ! 'T is kinder perilous stuff, now
in't it ?

' What sinners valoo, I resign.'

ot to say Joseph's one o' the sinners ; but mabbe
e'll come into the kingdom now, seein' he's
ripped an' wovnded like the prodigy.

' Harken, ye lively, and attend, ye vain ones ;
Pause in your mirth, adversity consider ;
Learn from a friend's pen, sentimental, painful,
Death-bed reflections.' "

he quaint old hymn, delivered in Tommy's most
racked and wandering quaver, sinking into a minor
rowl at the end, was almost too much for the wid-
w's gravity ; she turned suddenly into the door,
nd Tommy mumbled as he went, "'T ain't quite
y death-bed, nuther ; but hymns an' psalms don't
t as close as a new boot allers ; there hez to be a
margin."

This year there would indeed be a Thanksgiving
t the Gillett farm, for Joseph had resolved to
come home and live with his mother. In his pros-
erity he had given her the farm for her own, and
dded to the deed twenty thousand dollars, which
as far more than she needed in her simple life, so
at now it had accumulated considerably, and she
ad enough to keep her boy, as she still called him,
a comfort.

This time Cornelia did not run away ; she thought
f herself as an old woman, now that twenty long
ears stood between her and the girl of eighteen

who had believed Joe Gillett loved her as she loved him ; and her color did not fade or her heart falter as she held out her hand to welcome her old friend, as soon as his mother's silent, tearful greeting was over.

Joseph could not believe his eyes. He was gray, haggard, bent, showing to the full his forty-five years ; but not a line of silver streaked Cornelia's abundant dark hair, her eyes were sweet and serene, her broad forehead calm and noble, a steady rose of health glowed on her cheek, and the firm full lips were crimson as the rose's bud. She had been a lovely girl ; she was now a superb and serious woman, — one of those who give an inexpressible sense of comfort and cheer wherever they are met, and can make even a poor and dreary house into a real home by their presence. For a long and weary time Joe Gillett had not tasted peaceful happiness. Now as he sat by the crackling fire, with his mother beside him and Cornelia at the table sewing, just across the hearth, he seemed to himself to have been a mad fool for the last twenty years ; he could not even smile without a half sigh when old Tommy stumbled into the kitchen after tea, to welcome him home.

“Well, well, well ! here ye be, Joseph ! jest as large as life, an' twice as nateral. I'm 'mazin' tickled to see ye. I guess I be.

‘When I sot out for glory
I lef’ the world behind.’

That’s so. Now, Mis’ Gillett, you’ll hev sech

another Thanksgivin' Day, won't ye? Vittles of the best, pies an' things of the reel old-fashioned stripe, Joseph. I see 'em last night a-settin' on the butt'ry shelf in rows, an' that there turkey o' Deacon Hills's raisin' is jest as fat an' white as a chestnut worm; an' I picked the crambries myself down in th' old tamarack swamp; that 's the carnal an' airthly part on 't; the speritooal 's better; here ye be agin, th' only son, an' she a widder.

' Hallylooyer! 't is done!
I believe in the Son,
An' to glory we 'will go, will go, will go,
An' to glory we will go.'

Yes, marcy 's better 'n sacrifice an' burnt-offerin's. Yer boy 's got to the old pecooliar place where he was fetched up, an' you 've ben an' killed the fatted calf, — thet is to say, the turkey, ye know; same sperit, — an' you 've got your reward, — yes, marm.

' The men of grace hev found
Glo-ree begun below,
Celestyill fruit on airthly ground.'

Well, I must be a-goin'."

Cornelia had vanished too, — tears and laughter together had been too much for her; and long into the night Joe and his mother sat by the fire, saying little, but full of thought.

It was a long time before Joseph Gillett dared to ask Cornelia for the heart he had once thrown away, and longer still before she gave it openly into his keeping. He never fully knew how faithful it had been to him in absence and neglect.

The next year's Thanksgiving Day had a double celebration. Early in the morning the old minister drove over to the Gillett farm, and, before no witness but his mother, Joseph and Cornelia were married, and even that mother felt no pang of jealous affection when Joseph turned to his wife and said, with trembling lips, —

“Now I *am* at home again, Nely, and ready to give thanks.”

There was but one thing to regret, and that was Tommy Hymny's absence; but old age had weakened him at last, and a severe fall had broken his hip; he was fast sinking into the grave. After dinner Cornelia and Joe went over to the tiny house he lived in, to carry him some of the feast and cheer his loneliness.

“Here you be,” said the weak, cheerful voice, and the still keen old eyes sparkled with welcome. “I've lived to see this day fin'ly, an' I did'n't skerce expect to. I'm as pleased as pie, Joseph. I tell ye she's a dreadful good woman, Cornelye is; one of the fust best. I'd kinder like to see ye livin' together in peace an' so on, but I'm goin' hum, an' that's better.

‘I'm goin' hum, I'm goin' hum,
I'm goin' hum, to die no more.’”

The feeble quaver and the smiling eye were inexpressibly touching. Quick tears filled the bride's eyes.

“Why, don't ye, now! don't ye!” said Tommy earnestly. “I'm awful glad. I hain't never be-

longed to nobody in p'ticular here below, an' I do 'lot on seein' our folks in t' other world. There 's mother: I set by mother a sight when I was a leetle shaver; seemed as though I could n't noways hev her go. Pa 'd died afore I was born, ye see, — fell off'n a barn; but I hed to live; kinder squirmed up, as ye may say; but I 've dreamed about mother more times! There 's aunt Pamelye Ann, too, she that learned me sech a sight o' hymns. I expect she 's ben a-harpin' an' a-singin' ever sence she got there. I 'd like to jine in along of her once more. S'pose pa will be pleased to see me too. Dear me! it 's revivin' to think of.

' On Jordan's stormy banks I stan',
An' cast a wishful eye
Towardst Canaan's fair an' happy land,
Where my ' —

Oh dear! I can't sing no more. I do reely b'lieve I 'm a-goin'. I 'm so thankful " —

A smile ran across the withered old face like a gleam of sudden light, a flickering shadow followed. Tommy raised himself on one arm.

" Don't think I forget the Lord. He 's the hull on 't. I 'm a-goin' to keep Thanksgivin' 'long o' Him.

' Glory be to ' " —

And with this last hymn lingering on his pallid lips, he laid his head back on the pillow, smiled, and died.

HOW CELIA CHANGED HER MIND.

“IF there’s anything on the face of the earth I *do* hate, it’s an old maid!”

Mrs. Stearns looked up from her sewing in astonishment.

“Why, Miss Celia!”

“Oh, yes! I know it. I’m one myself, but all the same, I hate ’em worse than p’ison. They ain’t nothing nor nobody; they’re cumberers of the ground.” And Celia Barnes laid down her scissors with a bang, as if she might be Atropos herself, ready to cut the thread of life for all the despised class of which she was a notable member.

The minister’s wife was genuinely surprised at this outburst; she herself had been well along in life before she married, and though she had been fairly happy in the uncertain relationship to which she had attained, she was, on the whole, inclined to agree with St. Paul, that the woman who did not marry “doeth better.” “I don’t agree with you, Miss Celia,” she said gently. “Many, indeed, most of my best friends are maiden ladies, and I respect and love them just as much as if they were married women.”

“Well, I don’t. A woman that’s married is somebody; she’s got a place in the world; she ain’t

everybody's tag ; folks don't say, ' Oh, it's nobody but that old maid Celye Barnes ; ' it's ' Mis' Price,' and ' Mis' Simms,' or ' Thomas Smith's wife,' as though you was somebody. I don't know how 't is elsewheres, but here in Bassett you might as well be a dog as an old maid. I allow it might be better if they all had means or eddication : money's ' a dreadful good thing to have in the house,' as I see in a book once, and learning is sort of comp'ny to you if you're lonesome ; but then lonesome you be, and you've got to be, if you're an old maid, and it can't be helped noway."

Mrs. Stearns smiled a little sadly, thinking that even married life had its own loneliness when your husband was shut up in his study, or gone off on a long drive to see some sick parishioner or conduct a neighborhood prayer-meeting, or even when he was the other side of the fireplace absorbed in a religious paper or a New York daily, or meditating on his next sermon, while the silent wife sat unnoticed at her mending or knitting. " But married women have more troubles and responsibilities than the unmarried, Miss Celia," she said. " You have no children to bring up and be anxious about, no daily dread of not doing your duty by the family whom you preside over, and no fear of the supplies giving out that are really needed. Nobody but your own self to look out for."

" That's jest it," snapped Celia, laying down the boy's coat she was sewing with a vicious jerk of her thread. " There 't is ! Nobody to home to care if

you live or die ; nobody to peek out of the winder to see if you 're comin', or to make a mess of gruel or a cup of tea for you, or to throw ye a feelin' word if you 're sick nigh unto death. And old maids is just as li'ble to up and die as them that 's married. And as to responsibility, I ain't afraid to tackle that. Never! I don't hold with them that cringe and crawl and are skeert at a shadder, and won't do a living thing that they had ought to do because they 're 'afraid to take the responsibility.' Why, there 's Mrs. Deacon Trimble, she durst n't so much as set up a prayer-meetin' for missions or the temp'rance cause, because 't was 'sech a reesponsibility to take the lead in them matters.' I suppose it 's somethin' of a responsible chore to preach the gospel to the heathen, or grab a drinkin' feller by the scruff of his neck and haul him out of the horrible pit anyway, but if it 's dooty it 's got to be done, whether or no ; and I ain't afraid of pitchin' into anything the Lord sets me to do ! ”

“ Except being an old maid,” said Mrs. Stearns.

Celia darted a sharp glance at her over her silver-rimmed spectacles, and pulled her needle through and through the seams of Willy's jacket with fresh vigor, while a thoughtful shadow came across her fine old face. Celia was a candid woman, for all her prejudices, a combination peculiarly characteristic of New England, for she was a typical Yankee. Presently she said abruptly, “ I had n't thought on 't in that light.” But then the minister opened the door, and the conversation stopped.

Parson Stearns was tired and hungry and cross, and his wife knew all that as soon as she saw his face. She had learned long ago that ministers, however good they may be, are still men ; so to-day she had kept her husband's dinner warm in the under-oven, and had the kettle boiling to make him a cup of tea on the spot to assuage his irritation in the shortest and surest way ; but though the odor of a savory stew and the cheerful warmth of the cooking-stove greeted him as he preceded her through the door into the kitchen, he snapped out, sharply enough for Celia to hear him through the half-closed door, " What do you have that old maid here for so often ? "

" There ! " said Celia to herself, — " there 't is ! *He* don't look upon't as a dispensation, if she doos. Men-folks run the world, and they know it. There ain't one of the hull caboodle but what despises an onmarried woman ! Well, 't ain't altogether my fault. I would n't marry them that I could ; I could n't — not and be honest ; and them that I would hev had did n't ask me. I don't know as I 'm to blame, after all, when you look into 't."

And she went on sewing Willy's jacket, contrived with pains and skill out of an old coat of his father's, while Mrs. Stearns poured out her husband's tea in the kitchen, replenished his plate with stew, and cut for him more than one segment of the crisp, fresh apple-pie, and urged upon him the squares of new cheese that legitimately accompany

this deleterious viand of the race and country, the sempiternal, insistent, flagrant, and alas! also fragrant pie.


Celia Barnes was the tailoress of the little scattered country town of Bassett. Early left an orphan, without near relatives or money, she had received the scantiest measure of education that our town authorities deal to the pauper children of such organizations. She was ten years old when her mother, a widow for almost all those ten years, left her to the tender mercies of the selectmen of Bassett. The selectmen of our country towns are almost irresponsible governors of their petty spheres, and gratify the instinct of oligarchy peculiar to, and conservative of, the human race. Men must be governed and tyrannized over, — it is an inborn necessity of their nature; and while a republic is a beautiful theory, eminently fitted for a race who are “non Angli, sed Angeli,” it has in practice the effect of producing more than Russian tyranny, but on smaller scales and in far and scattered localities. Nowhere are there more despots than among village selectmen in New England. Those who have wrestled with their absolute monarchism in behalf of some charity that might abstract a few of the almighty dollars made out of poverty and distress from their official pockets know how positive and dogmatic is their use of power — *experto crede*. The Bassett “first selectman” promptly bound out little Celia Barnes to a hard, imperious woman, who made a white slave of the child,

and only dealt out to her the smallest measure of schooling demanded by law, because the good old minister, Father Perkins, interfered in the child's behalf.

As she was strong and hardy and resolute, Celia lived through her bondage, and at the "free" age of eighteen apprenticed herself to old Miss Polly Mariner, the Bassett tailoress, and being deft with her fingers and quick of brain, soon outran her teacher, and when Polly died, succeeded to her business.

She was a bright girl, not particularly noticeable among others, for she had none of that delicate flower-like New England beauty which is so peculiar, so charming, and so evanescent; her features were tolerably regular, her forehead broad and calm, her gray eyes keen and perceptive, and she had abundant hair of an uncertain brown; but forty other girls in Bassett might have been described in the same way; Celia's face was one to improve with age; its strong sense, capacity for humor, fine outlines of a rugged sort, were always more the style of fifty than fifteen, and what she said of herself was true.

She had been asked to marry an old farmer with five uproarious boys, a man notorious in East Bassett for his stinginess and bad temper, and she had promptly declined the offer. Once more fate had given her a chance. A young fellow of no character, poor, "shiftless," and given to cider as a beverage, had considered it a good idea to marry some one



who would make a home for him and earn his living. Looking about him for a proper person to fill this pleasant situation, he pounced on Celia — and she returned the attention!

“Marry *you*? I wonder you’ve got the sass to ask any decent girl to marry ye, Alfred Hatch! What be you good for, anyway? I don’t know what under the canopy the Lord spares you for, — only He doos let the tares grow amongst the wheat, Scripser says, and I’m free to suppose He knows why, but I don’t. No, *sir*! Ef you was the last man in the livin’ universe I would n’t tech ye with the tongs. If you’d got a speck of grit into you, you’d be ashamed to ask a woman to take ye in and support ye, for that’s what it comes to. You go ’long! I can make my hands save my head so long as I hev the use of ’em, and I have n’t no call to set up a private poor-house!”

So Alfred Hatch sneaked off, much like a cur that has sought to share the kennel of a mastiff, and been shortly and sharply convinced of his presumption.

Here ended Celia’s “chances,” as she phrased it. Young men were few in Bassett; the West had drawn them away with its subtle attraction of unknown possibilities, just as it does to-day, and Celia grew old in the service of those established matrons who always want clothes cut over for their children, carpet rags sewed, quilts quilted, and comfortables tacked. She was industrious and frugal, and in time laid up some money in the Dartford Savings’

Bank ; but she did not, like many spinsters, invest her hard-earned dollars in a small house. Often she was urged to do so, but her reasons were good for refusing.

“ I should be so independent? Well, I ’m as independent now as the law allows. I ’ve got two good rooms to myself, south winders, stairs of my own and outside door, and some privileges. If I had a house there ’d be taxes, and insurance, and cleanin’ off snow come winter-time, and hoein’ paths ; and likely enough I should be so fur left to myself that I should set up a garden, and make my succotash cost a dollar a pint a-hirin’ of a man to dig it up and hoe it down. Like enough, too, I should be gettin’ flower seeds and things ; I ’m kinder fond of blows in the time of ’em. My old fish-geran’um is a sight of comfort to me as ’t is, and there would be a bill of expense again. Then you can’t noway build a house with only two rooms in’t, it would be all outside ; and you might as well try to heat the universe with a cookin’-stove as such a house. Besides, how lonesome I should be ! It’s forlorn enough to be an old maid anyway, but to have it sort of ground into you, as you may say, by livin’ all alone in a hull house, that ain’t necessary nor agreeable. Now, if I ’m sick or sorry, I can just step downstairs and have aunt Nabby to help or hearten me. Deacon Everts he did set to work one time to persnade me to buy a house ; he said ’t was a good thing to be able to give somebody shelter ’t was poorer ’n I was. Says I, ‘ Deacon,

I've worked for my livin' ever sence I remember, and I know there 's no use in anybody bein' poorer than I be. I have n't no call to take any sech in and do for 'em. I give what I can to missions, — home ones, — and I 'm willin', cheerfully willin', to do a day's work now and again for somebody that is strivin' with too heavy burdens; but as for keepin' free lodgin' and board, I sha'n't do it.' 'Well, well, well,' says he, kinder as if I was a fractious young one, and a-sawin' his fat hand up and down in the air till I wanted to slap him, 'just as you'd ruther, Celye, — just as you'd ruther. I don't mean to drive ye a mite, only, as Scriptor says, "Provoke one another to love and good works."'

"That did rile me! Says I: 'Well, you've provoked me full enough, though I don't know as you've done it in the Scriptor sense; and mabbe I should n't have got so fur provoked if I had n't have known that little red house your grandsir' lived and died in was throwed back on your hands just now, and advertised for sellin'. I see the "Mounting County Herald," Deacon Everts.' He shut up, I tell ye. But I sha'n't never buy no house so long as aunt Nabby lets me have her two south chambers, and use the back stairway and the north door continual."

So Miss Celia had kept on in her way till now she was fifty, and to-day making over old clothes at the minister's. The minister's wife had, as we have seen, little romance or wild happiness in her life; it is not often the portion of country ministers'

wives ; and, moreover, she had two step-daughters who were girls of sixteen and twelve when she married their father. Katy was married herself now, this ten years, and doing her hard duty by an annual baby and a struggling parish in Dakota ; but Rosabel, whose fine name had been the only legacy her dying mother left the day-old child she had scarce had time to kiss and christen before she went to take her own " new name " above, was now a girl of twenty-two, pretty, headstrong, and rebellious. Nature had endowed her with keen dark eyes, crisp dark curls, a long chin, and a very obstinate mouth, which only her red lips and white even teeth redeemed from ugliness ; her bright color and her sense of fun made her attractive to young men wherever she encountered one of that rare species. Just now she was engaged in a serious flirtation with the station-master at Bassett Centre, — an impecunious youth of no special interest to other people and quite unable to maintain a wife. But out of the " strong necessity of loving," as it is called, and the want of young society or settled occupation, Rosa Stearns chose to fall in love with Amos Barker, and her father considered it a " fall " indeed. So, with the natural clumsiness of a man and a father, Parson Stearns set himself to prevent the matter, and began by forbidding Rosabel to see or speak or write to the youth in question, and thereby inspired in her mind a burning desire to do all three. Up to this time she had rather languidly amused herself by mild and gentle

flirtations with him, such as looking at him side-wise in church on Sunday, meeting him accidentally on his way to and from the station, for she spent at least half her time at her aunt's in Bassett Centre, and had even taught the small school there during the last six months. She had also sent him her tintype, and his own was secreted in her bureau drawer. He had invited her to go with him to two sleigh-rides and one sugaring-off, and always came home with her from prayer-meeting and singing-school ; but like a wise youth he had never yet proposed to marry her in due form, not so much because he was wise as because he was thoughtless and lazy ; and while he enjoyed the society of a bright girl, and liked to dangle after the prettiest one in Bassett, and the minister's daughter too, he did not love work well enough to shoulder the responsibility of providing for another those material but necessary supplies that imply labor of an incessant sort.

Rosabel, in her first inconsiderate anger at her father's command, sat down and wrote a note to Amos, eminently calculated to call out his sympathy with her own wrath, and promptly mailed it as soon as it was written. It ran as follows : —

DEAR FRIEND, — Pa has forbidden me to speak to you any more, or to correspond with you. I suppose I must submit so far ; but he did not say I must return your picture [the parson had not an idea that she possessed that precious thing], so I

shall keep it to remind me of the pleasant hours we have passed together.

“Fare thee well, and if forever,
Still forever fare thee well!”

Your true friend, ROSABEL STEARNS.

P. S. — I think pa is *horrid*!

So did Amos as he read this heart-rending missive, in which the postscript, according to the established sneer at woman's postscripts, carried the whole force of the epistle.

Now Amos had made a friend of Miss Celia by once telegraphing for her trunk, which she had lost on her way home from the only journey of her life, a trip to Boston, whither she had gone, on the strength of the one share of B. & A. R. R. stock she held, to spend the allotted three days granted to stockholders on their annual excursions, presumably to attend the annual meeting. Amos had put himself to the immense trouble of sending two messages for Miss Celia, and asked her nothing for the civility, so that ever after, in the fashion of solitary women, she held herself deeply in his debt. He knew that she was at work for Mrs. Stearns when he received Rosa's epistle, for he had just been over to Bassett on the train — there was but a mile to traverse — to get her to repair his Sunday coat, and not found her at home, but had no time to look her up at the parson's, as he must walk back to his station. Now he resolved to take his answer to Rosa to Miss Celia in the evening, and so be

sure that his abused sweetheart received it, for he had read too many dime novels to doubt that her tyrannic father would intercept their letters, and drive them both to madness and despair. That well-meaning but rather dull divine never would have thought of such a thing; he was a puffy, absent-minded, fat little man, with a weak, squeaky voice, and a sudden temper that blazed up like a bunch of dry weeds at a passing spark, and went out at once in flattest ashes. It had been Mrs. Stearns's step-motherly interference that drove him into his harshness to Rosa. She meant well and he meant well, but we all know what good intentions with no further sequel of act are good for, and nobody did more of that "paving" than these two excellent but futile people.

Miss Celia was ready to do anything for Amos Barker, and she considered it little less than a mortal sin to stand in the way of any marriage that was really desired by two parties. That Amos was poor did not daunt her at all; she had the curious faith that possesses some women, that any man can be prosperous if he has the will so to be; and she had a high opinion of this youth, based on his civility to her. It may be said of men, as of elephants, that it is lucky they do not know their own power; for how many more women would become their worshipers and slaves than are so to-day if they knew the abject gratitude the average woman feels for the least attention, the smallest kindness, the faintest expression of affection or good will.

We are all, like the Syrophenician woman, glad and ready to eat of the crumbs which fall from the children's table, so great is our faith — in men.

Miss Celia took the note in her big basket over to the minister's the very next day after that on which we introduced her to our readers. She was perhaps more rejoiced to contravene that reverend gentleman's orders than if she had not heard his querulous and contemptuous remark about her through the crack of the door on the previous afternoon; and it was with a sense of joy that, after all, an old maid could do something, that she slipped the envelope into Rosa's hands, and told her to put it quickly into her pocket, the very first moment she found herself alone with that young woman.

Many a hasty word had Parson Stearns spoken in the suddenness of his petulant temper, but never one that bore direr fruit than that when he called Celia Barnes "that old maid."

For of course Amos and Rosabel found in her an ardent friend. They had the instinct of distressed lovers to cajole her with all their confidences, caresses, and eager gratitude, and for once she felt herself dear and of importance. Amos consulted her on his plans for the future, which of course pointed westward, where he had a brother editing and owning a newspaper. This brother had before offered him a place in his office, but Amos had liked better the easy work of a station-master in a tiny village. Now his ambition was aroused, for the time at least. He wanted to make a home for Rosabel,

but, alack ! he had not one cent to pay their united expenses to Peoria, and a lion stood in the way. Here again Celia stepped in : she had some money laid up ; she would lend it to them.

I do not say that at this stage she had no misgivings, but even these were set at rest by a conversation she had with Mrs. Stearns some six weeks after the day on which Celia had so fully expressed her scorn of spinsters. She was there again to tack a comfortable for Rosabel's bed, and bethought herself that it was a good time to feel her way a little concerning Mrs. Stearns's opinion of things.

"They do say," she remarked, stopping to snip off her thread and twist the end of it through her needle's eye, "that your Rosy don't go with Amos Barker no more. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Stearns, with a half sigh. "Husband was rather prompt about it; he don't think Amos Barker ever'll amount to much, and he thinks his people are not just what they should be. You know his father never was very much of a man, and his grandfather is a real old reprobate. Husband says he never knew anything but crows come out of a crow's nest, and so he told Rosa to break acquaintance with him."

"Who does he like to hev come to see her?" asked Celia, with a grim set of her lips, stabbing her needle fiercely through the unoffending calico.

Mrs. Stearns laughed rather feebly. "I don't think he has anybody on his mind, Miss Celia. I don't think there are any young men in Bassett.

I dare say Rosa will never marry. I wish she would, for she is n't happy here, and I can't do much to help it, with all my cares."

"And you can't feel for her as though she was your own, if you try ever so," confidently asserted Celia.

"No, I suppose not. I try to do my duty by her, and I am sorry for her; but I know all the time an own mother would understand her better and make it easier for her. Mr. Stearns is peculiar, and men don't know just how to manage girls."

It was a cautious admission, but Miss Celia had sharp eyes, and knew very well that Rosabel neither loved nor respected her father, and that they were now on terms of real if unavowed hostility.

"Well," said she, "I don' know but you will have to have one of them onpleasant creturs, an old maid, in your fam'ly. I declare for 't, I 'd hold a Thanksgiving Day all to myself ef I 'd escaped that marcy."

"You may not always think so, Celia."

"I don't know what 'll change me. 'T will be something I don't look forrard to now," answered Celia obstinately.

Mrs. Stearns sighed. "I hope Rosa will do nothing worse than to live unmarried," she said; but she could not help wishing silently that some worthy man would carry the perverse and annoying girl out of the parsonage for good.

After this Celia felt a certain freedom to help Rosabel; she encouraged the lovers to meet at her

house, helped plan their elopement, sewed for the girl, and at last went with them as far as Brimfield when they stole away one evening, saw them safely married at the Methodist parsonage there, and bidding them good-speed, returned to Bassett Centre on the midnight train, and walked over to her own dwelling in the full moonshine of the October night, quite fearless and entirely exultant.

But she was not to come off unscathed. There was a scene of wild commotion at the parsonage next day, when Rosa's letter, modeled on that of the last novel heroine she had become acquainted with, was found on her bureau, as per novel aforesaid.

With her natural thoughtlessness she assured her parents that she "fled not unaccompanied," that her "kind and all but maternal friend, Miss Celia Barnes, would accompany her to the altar, and give her support and her countenance to the solemn ceremony that should make Rosabel Stearns the blessed wife of Amos Barker!"

It was all the minister could do not to swear as he read this astounding letter. His flabby face grew purple; his fat, sallow hands shook with rage; he dared not speak, he only sputtered, for he knew that profane and unbecoming words would surely leap from his tongue if he set it free; but he must—he really must—do or say something! So he clapped on his old hat, and with coat tails flying in the breeze, and rage in every step, set out to find Celia Barnes; and find her he did.

It would be unpleasant, and it is needless, to depict this encounter; language both unjust and unsavory smote the air and reverberated along the highway, for he met the spinster on her road to an engagement at Deacon Stiles's. Suffice it to say that both freed their minds with great enlargement of opinion, and the parson wound up with, —

“And I never want to see you again inside of my house, you confounded old maid!”

“There! that's it!” retorted Celia. “Ef I was n't an old maid, you would n't no more have darst to 'a' talked to me this way than nothin'. Ef I'd had a man to stand up to ye you'd have been dumber 'n Balaam's ass a great sight, — afore it seen the angel, I mean. I swow to man, I b'lieve I'd marry a hitchin'-post if 't was big enough to trounce ye. You great lummoX, if I could knock ye over you would n't peep nor mutter agin, if I be a woman!”

And with a burst of furious tears that asserted her womanhood Miss Celia went her way. Her hands were clinched under her blanket-shawl, her eyes red with angry rain, and as she walked on she soliloquized aloud: —

“I declare for 't, I b'lieve I'd marry the Old Boy himself if he'd ask me. I'm sicker 'n ever of bein' an old maid!”

“Be ye?” queried a voice at her elbow. “P'r'aps, then, you might hear to me if I was to speak my mind, Celye.”

Celia jumped. As she said afterward, "I vum I thought 't was the Enemy, for certain; and to think 't was only Deacon Everts!"

"Mercy me!" she said now; "is 't you, deacon?"

"Yes, it's me; and I think 't is a real providence I come up behind ye just in the nick of time. I've sold my farm only last week, and I've come to live on the street in that old red house of grand-sir's, that you mistrusted once I wanted you to buy. I'm real lonesome sence I lost my partner" (he meant his wife), "and I've been a-hangin' on by the edges the past two year; hired help is worse than nothing onto a farm, and hard to get at that; so I sold out, and I'm a-movin' yet, but the old house looks forlorn enough, and I was intendin' to look about for a second; so if you'll have me, Celye, here I be."

Celia looked at him sharply; he was an apple-faced little man, with shrewd, twinkling eyes, a hard, dull red still lingering on his round cheeks in spite of the deep wrinkles about his pursed-up lips and around his eyelids; his mouth gave him a consequential and self-important air, to which the short stubbly hair, brushed up "like a blaze" above his forehead, added; and his old blue coat with brass buttons, his homespun trousers, the old-fashioned aspect of his unbleached cotton shirt, all attested his frugality. Indeed, everybody knew that Deacon Everts was "near," and also that he had plenty of money, that is to say, far more than he could

spend. He had no children, no near relations ; his first wife had died two years since, after long invalidism, and all her relations had moved far west. All this Celia knew and now recalled ; her wrath against Parson Stearns was yet fresh and vivid ; she remembered that Simeon Everts was senior deacon of the church, and had it in his power to make the minister extremely uncomfortable if he chose. I have never said Celia was a very good woman ; her religion was of the dormant type not uncommon nowadays ; she kept up its observances properly, and said her prayers every day, bestowed a part of her savings on each church collection, and was rated as a church-member "in good and regular standing ;" but the vital transforming power of that Christianity which means to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself," had no more entered into her soul than it had into Deacon Everts's ; and while she would have honestly admitted that revenge was a very wrong sentiment, and entirely improper for any other person to cherish, she felt that she did well to be angry with Parson Stearns, and had a perfect right to "pay him off" in any way she could.

Now here was her opportunity. If she said "Yes" to Deacon Everts, he would no doubt take her part. Her objections to housekeeping were set aside by the fact that the house-owner himself would have to do those heavy labors about the house which she must otherwise have hired a man to do ;

and the cooking and the indoor work for two people could not be so hard as to sew from house to house for her daily bread. In short, her mind was slowly turning favorably toward this sudden project, but she did not want this wooer to be too sure; so she said: "W-e-ll, 't is a life sentence, as you may say, deacon, and I want to think on 't a spell. Let 's see, — to-day 's Tuesday; I 'll let ye know Thursday night, after prayer-meetin'."

"Well," answered the deacon.

Blessed Yankee monosyllable that means so much and so little; that has such shades of phrase and intention in its myriad inflections; that is "yes," or "no," or "perhaps," just as you accent it; that is at once preface and peroration, evasion and definition! What would all New England speech be without "well"? Even as salt without any savor, or pepper with no pungency.

Now it meant to Miss Celia assent to her proposition; and in accordance the deacon escorted her home from meeting Thursday night, and received for reward a consenting answer. This was no love affair, but a matter of mere business. Deacon Everts needed a housekeeper, and did not want to pay out wages for one; and Miss Celia's position she expressed herself as she put out her tallow candle on that memorable night, and breathed out on the darkness the audible aspiration, "Thank goodness, I sha'n't hev to die an old maid!"

There was no touch of sanctifying love or consoling affection, or even friendly comradeship, in

this arrangement; it was as truly a *marriage de convenance* as was ever contracted in Paris itself, and when the wedding day came, a short month afterward, the sourest aspect of November skies threatening a drenching pour, the dead and sodden leaves that strewed the earth, the wailing northeast wind, even the draggled and bony old horse behind which they jogged over to Bassett Centre, seemed fit accompaniments to the degraded ceremony performed by a justice of the peace, who concluded this merely legal compact, for Miss Celia stoutly refused to be married by Parson Stearns; she would not be accessory to putting one dollar in his pocket, even as her own wedding fee. So she went home to the little red house on Bassett Street, and begun her married life by scrubbing the dust and dirt of years from the kitchen table, making biscuit for tea, washing up the dishes, and at last falling asleep during the deacon's long nasal prayer, wherein he wandered to the ends of the earth, and prayed fervently for the heathen, piteously unconscious that he was little better than a heathen himself.

It did not take many weeks to discover to Celia what is meant by "the curse of a granted prayer." She could not at first accept the situation at all; she was accustomed to enough food, if it was plain and simple, when she herself provided it; but now it was hard to get such viands as would satisfy a healthy appetite.

"You've used a sight of pork, Celye," the dea-

con would remonstrate. "My first never cooked half what you do. We shall come to want certain, if you're so free-handed."

"Well, Mr. Everts, there was n't a mite left to set by. We eat it all, and I did n't have no more 'n I wanted, if you did."

"We must mortify the flesh, Celye. It's hullsome to get up from your victuals hungry. Ye know what Scriptor says, 'Jeshurun waxed fat an' kicked.'"

"Well, I ain't Jeshurun, but I expect I shall be more likely to kick if I don't have enough to eat, when it's only pork 'n' potatoes."

"My first used to say them was the best, for steady victuals, of anything, and she never used but two codfish and two quarts of m'lasses the year round; and as for butter, she was real sparin'; she'd fry our bread along with the salt pork, and 't was just as good."

"Look here!" snapped Celia. "I don't want to hear no more about your 'first.' I'm ready to say I wish 't she'd ha' been your last too."

"Well, well, well! this is onseemly contention, Celye," sputtered the alarmed deacon. "Le',s dwell together in unity so fur as we can, Mis' Everts. I have n't no intention to starve ye, none whatever. I only want to be keerful, so as we sha'n't have to fetch up in the poor-us."


"No need to have a poor-house to home," muttered Celia.

But this is only a mild specimen of poor Celia's

life as a married woman. She did not find the honor and glory of "Mrs." before her name a compensation for the thousand evils that she "knew not of" when she fled to them as a desirable change from her single blessedness. Deacon Everts entirely refused to enter into any of her devices against Parson Stearns; he did not care a penny about Celia's wrongs, and he knew very well that no other man than dreamy, unpractical Mr. Stearns, who eked out his minute pittance by writing school-books of a primary sort, would put up with four hundred dollars a year from his parish; yet that was all Bassett people would pay. If they must have the gospel, they must have it at the lowest living rates, and everybody would not assent to that.

So Celia found her revenge no more feasible after her marriage than before, and, gradually absorbed in her own wrongs and sufferings, her desire to reward Mr. Stearns in kind for his treatment of her vanished; she thought less of his futile wrath and more of her present distresses every day.

For Celia, like everybody who profanes the sacrament of marriage, was beginning to suffer the consequences of her misstep. As her husband's mean, querulous, loveless character unveiled itself in the terrible intimacy of constant and inevitable companionship, she began to look woefully back to the freedom and peace of her maiden days. She learned that a husband is by no means his wife's



defender always, not even against reviling tongues. It did not suit Deacon Everts to quarrel with any one, whatever they said to him, or of him and his; he "did n't want no enemies," and Celia bitterly felt that she must fight her own battles; she had not even an ally in her husband. She became not only defiant, but also depressed; the consciousness of a vital and life-long mistake is not productive of cheer or content; and now, admitted into the freemasonry of married women, she discovered how few among them were more than household drudges, the servants of their families, worked to the verge of exhaustion, and neither thanked nor rewarded for their pains. She saw here a woman whose children were careless of, and ungrateful to her, and her husband coldly indifferent; there was one on whom the man she had married wreaked all his fiendish temper in daily small injuries, little vexatious acts, petty tyrannies, a "street-angel, house-devil" of a man, of all sorts the most hateful. There were many whose lives had no other outlook than hard work until the end should come, who rose up to labor and lay down in sleepless exhaustion, and some whose days were a constant terror to them from the intemperate brutes to whom they had intrusted their happiness, and indeed their whole existence.

It was no worse with Celia than with most of her sex in Bassett; here and there, there were of course exceptions, but so rare as to be shining examples and objects of envy. Then, too, after two years,

there came forlorn accounts of poor Rosabel's situation at the west. Amos Barker had done his best at first to make his wife comfortable, but change of place or new motives do not at once, if ever, transform an indolent man into an active and efficient one. He found work in his brother's office, but it was the hard work of collecting bills all about the country; the roads were bad, the weather as fluctuating as weather always is, the climate did not agree with him, and he got woefully tired of driving about from dawn till after dark, to dun unwilling debtors. Rosa had chills and fever and babies with persistent alacrity; she had indeed enough to eat, with no appetite, and a house, with no strength to keep it. She grew untidy, listless, hysterical; and her father, getting worried by her despondent and infrequent letters, actually so far roused himself as to sell his horse, and with this sacrificial money betook himself to Mound Village, where he found Rosabel with two babies in her arms, dust an inch deep on all her possessions, nothing but pork, potatoes, and corn bread in the pantry, and a slatternly negress washing some clothes in a kitchen that made the parson shudder.

The little man's heart was bigger than his soul. He put his arms about Rosa and the dingy babies, and forgave her all; but he had to say, even while he held them closely and fondly to his breast, "Oh, Rosy, I told you what would happen if you married that fellow."

Of course Rosa resented the speech, for, after all,

she had loved Amos; perhaps could love him still if the poverty and malaria and babies could have all been eliminated from her daily life.

Fortunately the parson's horse had sold well, for it was strong and young, and the rack of venerable bones with which he replaced it was bought very cheap at a farmer's auction, so he had money enough to carry Rosa and the two children home to Bassett, where two months after she added another feeble, howling cipher to the miserable sum of humanity.


Miss — no, Mrs. — Celia's conscience stung her to the quick when she encountered this ghastly wreck of pretty Rosabel Stearns, now called Mrs. Barker. She remembered with deep regret how she had given aid and comfort to the girl who had defied and disobeyed parental counsel and authority, and so brought on herself all this misery. She fancied that Parson Stearns glared at her with eyes of bitter accusation and reproach, and not improbably he did, for beside his pity and affection for his daughter, it was no slight burden to take into his house a feeble woman with two children helpless as babies, and to look forward to the expense and anxiety of another soon to come. And Mrs. Stearns had never loved Rosa well enough to be complacent at this addition to her family cares. She gave the parson no sympathy. It would have been her way to let Rosabel lie on the bed she had made, and die there if need be. But the poor worn-out creature died at home, after all, and the third baby

lay on its mother's breast in her coffin: they had gone together.

Celia felt almost like a murderess when she heard that Rosabel Barker was dead. She did not reflect that in all human probability the girl would have married Amos if she, Celia, had refused to help or encourage her. It began to be an importunate question in our friend's mind whether she herself had not made a mistake too; whether the phrase "single blessedness" was not an expression of a vital truth rather than a scoff. Celia was changing her mind no doubt, surely if slowly.

Meantime Deacon Everts did not find all the satisfaction with his "second" that he had anticipated. Celia had a will of her own, quite undisciplined, and it was too often asserted to suit her lord and master. Secretly he planned devices to circumvent her purposes, and sometimes succeeded. In prayer-meeting and in Sunday-school the idea haunted him; his malice lay down and rose up with him. Even when he propounded to his Bible class the important question, "How fur be the heathen *ree*-sponsible for what they dun know?" and asked them "to ponder on 't through the comin' week," he chuckled inwardly at the thought that Celia could not evade *her* responsibility; she knew enough, and would be judged accordingly: the deacon was not a merciful man.

At last he hit upon that great legal engine whereby men do inflict the last deadly kick upon their wives: he would remodel his will. Yes, he



would leave those gathered thousands to foreign missions ; he would leave behind him the indisputable testimony and taunt that he considered the wife of his bosom less than the savages and heathen afar off. He forgot conveniently that the man "who provideth not for his own household hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." And in his delight of revenge he also forgot that the law of the land provides for a man's wife and children in spite of his wicked will. Nor did he remember that his life-insurance policy for five thousand dollars was made out in his wife's name, simply as his wife, her own name not being specified. He had paid the premium always from his "first's" small annual income, and agreed that it should be written for her benefit, but he supposed that at her death it had reverted to him. He forgot that he still had a wife when he mentioned that policy in his assets recorded in the will, and to save money he drew that evil document up himself, and had it signed down at "the store" by three witnesses.

Celia had borne her self-imposed yoke for four years, when it was suddenly broken. A late crop of grass was to be mowed in mid-July on the meadow which appertained to the old house, and the deacon, now some seventy years old, to save hiring help, determined to do it by himself. The grass was heavy and over-ripe, the day extremely hot and breathless, and the grim Mower of Man trod side by side with Simeon Everts, and laid him too, all along by the rough heads of timothy and

the purpled feather-tops of the blue-grass. He did not come home at noon or at night, and when Celia went down to the lot to call him he heard no summons of hers; he had answered a call far more imperative and final.

After the funeral Celia found his will pushed back in the deep drawer of an old secretary, where he kept his one quill pen, a bottle of dried ink, a lump of chalk, some rat-poison, and various other odds and ends.

She was indignant enough at its tenor; but it was easily broken, and she not only had her "thirds," but the life policy reverted to her also, as it was made out to Simeon Everts's wife, and surely she had occupied that position for four wretched years. Then, also, she had a right to her support for one year out of the estate, and the use of the house for that time.

Oh, how sweet was her freedom! With her characteristic honesty she refused to put on mourning, and even went to the funeral in her usual gray Sunday gown and bonnet. "I won't lie, anyhow!" she answered to Mrs. Stiles's remonstrance. "I ain't a mite sorry nor mournful. I could ha' wished he'd had time to repent of his sins, but sence the Lord saw fit to cut him short, I don't feel to rebel ag'inst it. I wish 't I'd never married him, that's all!"

"But, Celye, you got a good livin'."

"I earned it."

"And he's left ye with means too."

“He done his best not to. I don’t owe him nothing for that; and I earned that too,—the hull on ’t. It’s poor pay for what I’ve lived through; and I’m a’most a mind to call it the wages of sin, for I done wrong, ondeniably wrong, in marryin’ of him; but the Lord knows I’ve repented, and said my lesson, if I did get it by the hardest.”

Yet all Bassett opened eyes and mouth both when on the next Thanksgiving Day Celia invited every old maid in town — seven all told — to take dinner with her. Never before had she celebrated this old New England day of solemn revel. A woman living in two small rooms could not “keep the feast,” and rarely had she been asked to any family conclave. We Yankees are conservative at Thanksgiving if nowhere else, and like to gather our own people only about the family hearth; so Celia had but orce or twice shared the turkeys of her more fortunate neighbors.

Now she called in Nabby Hyde and Sarah Gillett, Ann Smith, Celestia Potter, Delia Hills, Sophronia Ann Jenkins and her sister Adelia Ann, ancient twins, who lived together on next to nothing, and were happy.

Celia bloomed at the head of the board, not with beauty, but with gratification. “Well,” she said, as soon as they were seated, “I sent for ye all to come because I wanted to have a good time, for one thing, and because it seems as though I’d ought to take back all the sassy and disagreeable things I used to be forever flingin’ at old maids. ‘I spoke

in my haste,' as Scriptor says, and also in my ignorance, I'm free to confess. I feel as though I could keep 'Thanksgivin' to-day with my hull soul. I'm so thankful to be an old maid ag'in ! ”

“ I thought you was a widder,” snapped Sally Gillett.

Celia flung a glance of wrath at her, but scorned to reply.

“ And I'm thankful too that I'm spared to help ondo somethin' done in that ignorance. I've got means, and, as I've said before, I earned 'em. I don't feel noway obleeged to him for 'em ; he did n't mean it. But now I can I'm goin' to adopt Rosy Barker's two children, and fetch 'em up to be dyed-in-the-wool old maids ; and every year, so long as I live, I'm goin' to keep an old maids' 'Thanksgivin' for a kind of a burnt-offering, sech as the Bible tells about, for I've changed my mind clear down to the bottom, and I go the hull figure with the 'postle Paul when he speaks about the onmarried, 'It is better if she so abide.' Now let's go to work at the victuals.”

A TOWN MOUSE AND A COUNTRY MOUSE.

“WELL, Mis’ Phelps, I ’m reelly a-goin’ to Glover to see Melindy at last. I be, pos’tive. Don’t seem as though it could be true, ’t is so long sence I sot eyes on her; and I’ve lotted on it so much, and tried so often and failed up on ’t, that I can’t hardly believe in ’t now it ’s comin’ to pass. But I be a-goin’ now, sure as you live, Providence permittin’.”

The speaker was a small, thin old woman, alert and active as a chickadee, with a sharp twitter in her voice, reminding one still more of that small black and gray bird that cheers us with his gay defiance of winter, though he utter it from a fir bough bent to the ground with heavy snows. Her dark gray hair was drawn into a tight knot at the back of her head; her tear-worn eyes shone with a pathetic sort of lustre, as if joy were stranger to them than grief; her thin lips wore a doubtful smile, but still the traces of a former dimple, under that smiling influence, creased itself in one lined and sallow cheek. You saw at a glance that she had worked hard always; her small hands were knotted at the joints and callous in the palms; her shoulders were slightly bent. And you saw, too, that poverty had enforced her labor, for her dress,

though scrupulously neat, and shaped with a certain shy deference to the fashion of the day, was of poor material and scant draperies.

Amanda Hart was really a remarkable woman, but she did not know it. Her life had been one long struggle with poverty and illness in her family, to whom she was utterly devoted. She had earned her living in one way or another as long as she could remember. Her mother died when she was a mere child, and her father was always a "shiftless," miserable creature, in his later years the prey of a slow yet fatal disease, dying by inches of torture that defied doctors and wrung poor Amanda's heart with helpless sympathy.

All these years she not only nursed, but supported him ; scrubbed, sewed, washed, — did anything that brought in a little money ; for there were doctors' bills to pay, besides the very necessities of life to be obtained. Her one comfort was her sister Melinda, a child ten years younger than Amanda, a rosy, sturdy, stolid creature, on whom the elder sister lavished all the deep love of a heart that was to know no other maternity. At last death mercifully removed old Anson Hart to some other place, — he had long been useless here ; but before that relief came, Melinda, by this time a young woman, had married a farmer in Glover, and Amanda had moved into Munson, and was there alone. She "kinder scratched along," as she phrased it, and earned her living, if no more, in the various ways Yankee ingenuity can discover in a large country

town. She had friends who helped her to employment, and always made her welcome in their homes ; for her quaint shrewdness, her very original use, or misuse, of language, her humor, and her kind heart were all pleasant to have about.

Melinda's marriage was a brief experience. She was left a widow at the end of two years, with a small house and an acre of land ; and there she lived alone, on a lonely country road, three miles from the village of Glover, and with no other house in sight.

" I guess it is as good as I can do," she wrote to Amanda. " I can't sell the house, and there's quite a piece of garden to it, besides some apple-trees and quince bushes. Garden sass always was the most of my living, and there's some tailoring to be did, so as that I can get a little cash. Then folks are glad to have somebody around killing times and sech like. Mary Ann Barker used to do that, but she's been providentially removed by death, so I can step right into her shoes. I guess, any way, I'll chance it for a spell, and see how it works."

Melinda had "faculty," and her scheme did "work" so well that she lived in the tiny house for years, and in all that time Amanda had not seen her. It was a long journey, and money was hard to get. Perhaps Melinda might have gathered enough to take the journey, but she was by no means affectionate or sentimental. Life was a steady grind to her ; none of its gentle amenities flourished in the red house. She had her "livin' "

and was independent : that sufficed her. But Amanda was more eager every year to see her sister. She thought of her by day and dreamed of her by night ; and after fifteen years her cracked teapot at last held coin enough for the expedition. Her joy was great, and the tremulous, sweet old face was pathetic in its constant smiling. She planned her journey as she sat at work, and poured her anticipations into all the neighbors' ears till their sympathy was well worn out.

But at last the day came. Amanda's two rooms were set in order, the windows closed, every fly chased out with the ferocity that inspires women against that intrusive insect, and the fire was raked down to its last spark the night before.

"I don't care for no breakfast," she said to the good woman in whose house she lived. "I should have to bile the kettle and have a cup and plate to wash up ; and like enough the cloth 'd get mildewy, if I left it damp. I'll jest take a dry bite in my clean han'k'chief. I've eet up all my victuals but two cookies and a mite of cheese that I saved a puppus."

"Why, Mandy Hart! you're all of a twitter! Set right down here and hev a cup o' tea 'long o' me. You've got heaps o' time ; now don't ye get into a swivet!"

"Well, Mis' Phelps, I thank you kindly ; a drop of tea will taste proper good. I expect I be sort o' nervy, what with takin' a journey and the thought o' seein' Melindy. Now you tell : do I look good

enough to go travelin' ? I thought, first off, to wear the gown Mis' Swift give me, — that Heneryette, I b'lieve she called it ; but I've sponged and pressed it till it looks as good as new, and I sort o' hate to set on 't in the dust o' them cars all day. I thought mabbe this stripid gown would do."

"You look as slick as a pin," Mrs. Phelps answered.

It was an odd pin, then ! The "stripid" dress was both short and scant even for Amanda's little figure ; it did not conceal an ancient pair of prunella shoes that use had well fitted to her distorted feet, and her ankle-bones, enlarged with rheumatism, showed like doorknobs under her knit cotton stockings. Over her dress she wore a brown linen duster, shiny with much washing and ironing, and her queer little face beamed from under a wide black straw hat wreathed with a shabby band of feather trimming.

But she did not look amiss or vulgar, and the joy that shone in her eyes would have transfigured sackcloth, and turned ashes into diamond dust. She was going to see Melinda ! The unsatisfied mother heart in her breast beat fast at the thought. Neither absence nor silence had cooled this one love of her life.

"I expect I shall enjoy the country dretfully," she said to Mrs. Phelps. "It's quite a spell sence I've been there. Mother, she set such store by green things, trees and sech, and cinnament roses, and fennel. My land ! she talked about 'em all through

her last sickness, even when she was dangerous. I shall be proper glad to get out to Glover."

Poor soul! all this meant Melinda.

So she trotted off to the station, with her lunch tied up in a handkerchief in one hand and her cotton umbrella in the other, a boy following with her old cow-skin trunk on a wheelbarrow. He was a bad boy, for on the way he picked up an advertisement of a hair restorer and fastened it upon that bald trunk, chuckling fiendishly. But this was lost on Amanda; she paid him his quarter with an ambient smile, and mounted the car steps with sudden agility. The car was not full, so she sat down next a window, struggled with a pocketful of various things to find her ticket, thrust it inside her glove, to be ready, and resigned herself to the journey. Outside the window were broad fields green with new grass, budding forests, bright and tranquil rivers, distant mountains, skies of spring, blue to their depths, and flecked with white cloud-fleeces; but they were lost on Amanda. She had not inherited her mother's tastes: she saw in all this glory only Melinda, the rosy girl who had left her so long ago; to that presence she referred all nature, wondering if this quiet farmhouse were like that at Glover, if Melinda's apple-trees had bloomed like those on the hillsides she passed, or if her sister could see those far-off hills from her windows. It was a long day. The "dry bite" was a prolonged meal to our traveler. Every crumb was eaten slowly, in order to pass the weary

time. Nobody spoke to her; the busy conductor had short answers for her various questions. She was tired, dusty, and half homesick when at last that official put his head in at the door and yelled: "Sha-drach! Sha-drach! *Sha-drach!* Change for Medway, Racketts-Town, *and* Glover!"

So Amanda grasped her handkerchief, and, helped by her sturdy umbrella, for she was stiff with long sitting, found her way to the door, and was, as she phrased it, "yanked" off the steps upon the platform by an impatient brakeman. Why should he be civil to a poor old woman? Fortunately for her, the stage for Glover stood just across the platform, and she saw the driver shoulder her bare brass-nailed trunk which was duly directed to Melinda and Glover. A long five miles lay before her. The driver was not talkative, she was the only passenger, and it seemed a journey in itself before the stage drew up at the gate in front of Mrs. Melinda Perkins's farmhouse, and she came out of the door to meet her sister. A faint color rose to Amanda's cheek, her lips trembled, her eyes glittered, but she only said, "Well, here I be."

Melinda smiled grimly. She was not used to smiling; there was no sensitive shyness about her. Tall and muscular, her heavy face, her primmed-up mouth, her hard eyes glooming under that deep fold on the lids that in moments of anger narrows the eye to a slit and gives it a snaky gleam, her flat, low forehead, from which the dull hair was strained back and tightly knotted behind, — all told of a

narrow, severe nature, at once jealous and loveless, the very antithesis of Amanda's. It is true, she stooped and kissed her sister, but the kiss was as frigid as the nip of a clamshell.

"Come in," she said, in an overbearing voice. "Hiram Young, you fetch that trunk in right here into the bedroom."

"You 'll hev to sleep 'long o' me, Mandy," announced Melinda, as she swung open her bedroom door, "for the' ain't no other place to sleep."

"Why, I sha'nt object, not a mite," beamed Amanda. "It 'll seem like old times. But you've growed a sight, Melindy."

"I think likely, seein' it's quite a spell since you see me ; but I 've growed crossways, I guess," and Melinda gave a hard cackle.

"How nice you 're fixed up, too !" said admiring Amanda, as she looked about her in the twilight of green paper shades and spotless cotton curtains. The room was too neat for comfort ; there was a fluffy, airless scent about it ; the only brightness came from the glittering brasses of the bureau, that even in that half-dark shimmered in well-scoured splendor. Outside, the sweet June day was gently fading, full of fresh odors and young breezes ; but not a breath entered that apartment, for even a crack of open window might admit a fly !

Melinda introduced her guest to a tiny closet on one side of the chimney, and then went out to get tea, leaving Amanda to unpack her trunk. This

was soon done, for even that small closet was more than roomy enough for her other dress, her duster, and her hat; so that she soon followed her sister, guided by savory odors of hot biscuit, "picked" codfish, and wild strawberries. This was indeed a feast to the "town mouse;" such luxuries as raised biscuit and aromatic wild fruit were not to be indulged in at her own home, and she enjoyed them even more for the faint, delicious odor of old-fashioned white roses stealing in at the open door, the scent of vernal grass in the meadows, the rustle of new leaves on the great maple that shaded the house-corner, and the sharp chirp of two saucy robins hopping briskly about the yard.

It was delightful to Amanda, but when night shut down the silence settled on her like a pall; she missed the click of feet on the pavement, the rattle of horse cars, the distant shriek of railway trains. There was literally not a sound; the light wind had died away, and it was too early in the season for crickets or katydids, too late for the evening love-songs of toads and frogs.

In vain did she try to sleep; she lay hour after hour "listening to the silence," and trying not to stir, lest she should wake Melinda. Had a mouse, her lifelong terror, squeaked or scratched in the wall, it would have relieved her; but in this dead stillness there was that peculiar horror of a sense suddenly made useless that affects the open eye in utter darkness, or the palsied lips that can make no sound.

Night seemed endless to the poor little woman ; but when at last birds began to awake and chirp to the gray dawn, she fell so soundly asleep that not even Melinda's rising, or the clatter of her preparations for breakfast in the next room, aroused her. But her sister's voice was effectual.

"Be you a-goin' to sleep all day?" said that incisive and peremptory tongue.

The question brought Amanda to her feet, quite ashamed of herself.

"You see," she explained to Melinda at breakfast, "I did n't get to sleep till nigh sun-risin', 't was so amazin' still."

"Still! That had ought to have made ye sleep. Well, I never did! Now I can't sleep ef there's a mite o' noise. I'd hev kep' chickens but for that. Deacon Parker wanted to give me some o' his white Braymys, but I said: 'No; I've got peace and quietness, and I ain't goin' to have it broke up by roosters.'"

"I s'pose it's accordin' as we're used to 't," meekly replied Amanda, with an odd sense of being in the wrong, but she said no more; she was beginning to discover that it was not serene bliss to be with Melinda again. In their long separation she had forgotten her sister's hard and abrupt ways, and indeed in Melinda's solitary and very lonely life her angles had grown sharper and sharper; nothing had worn them off. We can enjoy idealizing a friend, but the longer that ideal fills our hearts the harder does reality scourge us. Amanda could not

have explained her heart-sinking to herself. She laid it to the isolation of her sister's house, and, while Melinda made bread, went out to walk a little way, to see if she could not enjoy the country. All about lay green fields, wooded hills, and blooming orchards; for spring was late here in Glover, and only the sheltered hillsides had cast all blossoms from the later trees. A deep sense of desolation clutched Amanda's homesick heart; there was not a house to be seen, not even a curl of smoke to show that one might be hidden somewhere. Used all her days to the throng and bustle of a large town, she found this country peace unendurable. She went back to the house, took up her knitting, and tried to be conversational.

"Have n't got any neighbors at all, have ye, Melindy?"

"Nearest is Deacon Parker, 'n' he lives three mild back behind Pond Hill."

"My sakes! what if you should be took sick?"

"But I ain't never *took* sick," snapped Melinda, looking like a sturdy oak-tree utterly incapable of ailments.

"But you might be; nobody knows when their time is comin'. Why, when I had the ammonia last year, I do'no but what I should ha' died,—guess I should,—if it had n't have been for the neighbors."

"Well, I sha'n't go over no bridges till I come to 'em," sharply replied Melinda, paring her potatoes with extra energy.

"Glover is quite a ways from here, ain't it?"
queried Amanda.

"Three mild."

Evidently Melinda was not given to talking, but Amanda would not be discouraged.

"Don't have no county paper, do ye?"

"No, I have n't got no time to spend on them things. I can 'tend up to my own business, if other folks 'll take care of theirs."

Amanda gave an inaudible sigh, and tried no more conversation. After dinner Melinda did ask a few questions, in her turn, about old acquaintances, but her sister's prattle was effectually cut short. Never in her life had Amanda found a day so dreary or a night so long, for she had it to dread beforehand. Even the sharp rattle and quick flash of a June thunder-storm was a relief to her, for it woke Melinda, and sent her about the house to shut a window here and fasten down a scuttle there, and for a brief space kept her awake; but after that little space the capable woman slept like a log, — she did not even snore, — and the night resumed its deadly silence.

Oh, how Amanda longed for the living noises that she had so often scolded about in Munson! The drunken cackle of men just out from the saloons, the rapid rush of a doctor's carriage whirling by in the small hours, a cross baby next door that would yell its loudest just when she was sleepest, — any, all of these would have been welcome in this ghastly stillness.

The next day was Sunday, and when the rigidly recurring Sunday breakfast of baked beans and codfish balls was over Amanda inquired timidly:—

“Do you go to meetin’ on the Sabbath, Melindy?”

“Well, I guess so! We ain’t clear heathen.”

“I did n’t know but ’t was too fur to walk.”

“’T is, but Deacon Parker goes right a-past here, and stops for me. He’s got a two-seater, and there ’ll be room for you, for he don’t take nobody but me and Widder Drake.”

“Where’s Mis’ Parker?”

“I do’no. She’s dead.”

Amanda’s eyes opened wide at this doubtful remark about the late Mrs. Parker, but she said nothing; she satisfied herself with watching Melinda dress. Her Sunday garments were a black alpaca gown, shiny with age, what she called a “mantilly” of poor black silk edged with emaciated fringe, and the crowning horror of a Leghorn bonnet, “cut down” from its ancient dimensions into a more modern scoop, but still a scoop. It was surmounted with important bows of yellow-green satin ribbon and a fat pink rose with two stout buds. Amanda felt a chill run over her at this amazing head-gear. She did not know that the rose was Melinda’s last protest against old age, her symbol of lingering youth, her “no surrender” flag.

“Why don’t you wear a hat, Melindy?” she asked meekly, as she smoothed out the dejected band of her own. “Bunnets is all gone out down to Munson.”

“Well, they ain’t here, and I don’t think it’s seemly to wear them flats to meetin’; they’ll do to go a-huckleberryin’ or fetchin’ cows home from pastur’, but, to my mind, they’re kinder childish for meetin’.”

Amanda said nothing, and just then the deacon drove up to the gate, — a spare old man, with long, scanty white hair and red-rimmed, watery eyes. Amanda was duly presented.

“Make you ’quainted with my sister, Mandy Hart, down to Munson.”

“Pleased to see ye,” bobbed Deacon Parker, with a toothless grin. “I’d get out to help ye in, but old Whitey don’t never stand good without tyin’; and gener’lly Mis’ Drake holds her, but she’s gone to Shadrach this week back. She’s gardeen to a child over there, and there’s some court business about the prop’ty.”

“Lawsy! we can get in good enough,” said Melinda, alertly climbing over the hind wheel, and helping Amanda to follow.

“Spry, ain’t she?” said the deacon to Amanda, with another void and formless smile. “Huddup, Whitey! We don’t want to be late to the sanctoary.”

The drive was beautiful, and gave poor Amanda a gentler opinion of the country. It wound by little silver brooks, under the fragrant gloom of pine woods, and the sweet breath of the fields filled her weak lungs with new life. But alas! the meeting-house was a square barn with a sharp

steeple, and as she sat down on the bare seat of a corner pew, and choked with the dead odors of "meetin'-seed," the musty chill of the past week, the camphor that exhaled from Sunday clothes but recently taken from their wintry repose, and the smell of boots that had brought their scent of stable and barnyard, she longed to be back in the handsome, well-ventilated church at Munson, with the soft rustle of a well-dressed, perfumy congregation about her, and the sound of a fine organ and well-trained choir in her ears, offended now by the tuneless squalls and growls of these country singers. Poor town mouse! She was ready to exclaim with the mouse of Horace: —

"But, Lord, my friend, this savage scene!"

That very night she told Melinda that she must leave her on Tuesday, on account of promised work, and accordingly Tuesday saw her safely back again in dear Munson. Her tiny rooms seemed like a refuge to her, as she opened the blinds and let in the warm air. Her natural vivacity, subdued by Melinda and the solitude of the country, returned.

"Goodness gracious, Mis' Phelps!" Amanda exclaimed to her landlady, "I would n't no more live in the country than nothin'. Why 't was as still as a ear-trumpet out there. I 'd ha' give all my old shoes to ha' heard a street car or a coal wagon a-rumblin' by. And lonesome! There was n't so much as a rooster a-predicatin' by in the road. I thought I should die for want of knowin'

I was alive; and the nighttime shuts down onto ye like a pot-lid. You know you can't go marvelin' round in other folks' houses. I jest had to set and knit daytimes, and sense the lonesomeness. I know I should have shockanum palsy if I had to stay there. Melindy is comin' to see me for a spell early in July, about the Fourth, when it's kinder lively, and I guess 't'll wake her up some."

"I expect you had good country victuals and plenty o' flowers, though?" asked Mrs. Phelps, in the indirect Yankee fashion.

"Well, I did. Melindy's a most an excellent cook, and the' was a patch of wild strawberries growed to the south side of her old barn that was ripe a'ready; they have got taste into 'em, I tell ye! But, land! victuals and drink ain't the chief o' *my* diet. I'm real folksy; grasshoppers ain't no neighbors to me. I want to be amongst them that'll talk back to me; not dumb things that won't never say nothing if you should merang 'em all day."

"Why, how you talk! How does Mis' Perkins stan' it?"

"I do'no. I expect she's hardened to it, as you may say. I'd jest as lives set down on a slab in the sempitery all my days as to stay out to Melindy's. I do'no but I'd rather; for there'd be funerals, and mourners, and folks comin' to desecrate the graves with flowers, and sech, intervenin' 'most every day there. 'T would be real lively in comparison with Melindy's house."

Now Amanda set herself to adorn her little rooms

and keep them in spotless order till her sister should come; and when that happy day arrived she met her at the station, her smiling old face as pleasant as a hollyhock blossom.

"If I ain't tickled, now!" she beamed on Melinda. "I've reelly got you here."

"I said I'd come, did n't I?" answered Melinda, with a laborious smile. "I have n't fetched no great of clothes, for I can't stay long; fruit is comin' in, and I've got to make preserves for quite a few folks down to Glover."

She secretly blessed herself for making this announcement early, when she reached Amanda's little tenement: two rooms over a grocer's store, redolent with smells of kerosene, cloves, pepper, and the like, added to the fumes of bad tobacco from customers' pipes.

Not only smells, but dust and the heat of a blazing July day added to her discomfort, though she had the grace not to complain; and when Amanda had laid aside that wonderful "bunnet," and sét Melinda by the north window with a fan, the country mouse felt a little more comfortable. The tea daunted her; she could not eat the sliced "Bolony," as Amanda called it; the baker's bread was dust and ashes to her taste; the orange marmalade found no favor, though it was a delicacy Amanda had kept for this special purpose, the gift of a friend. Poor Melinda gave afterward a graphic description of this dainty meal to Deacon Parker.

"I never see sech victuals in *my* life! No won-

der Mandy's lean. Cake and bread jest like sawdust, and, if you'll believe it, raw sassages, actooally *raw*, sliced up on a dish! I never could eat raw meat, much less pork. And the preserves was as bitter as boneset! I went hungry to bed, you'd better believe."

Yet worse was in store for the country mouse. Amanda had given up her bed to her visitor, and lain down on the sitting-room lounge; and though it was a breathless night, at first Melinda slept, she was so tired, in spite of the noisy horse cars, rattling wagons, and click of feet.

It was the night of the third of July, and as a neighboring church clock struck twelve the first giant cracker exploded right under the bedroom window. Roused by the crash, that was followed fast by another and another, Melinda started up in all the terror of darkness and din, screaming:—

"Mandy! Mandy! where be ye? What on earth's the matter?"

Smiling superior, though but half awake, Amanda answered:—

"'Tain't nothin'; it's the Fourth, and them boys is a-settin' off crackers. Pesky little serpents! I s'pose there is a puppus in boys, but I've wished frequent that men growed out o' somethin' more pleasant. You turn over an' go to sleep, sister; the' won't nothin' do ye no harm."

"Oh-h!" shrieked Melinda again, as a cannon roared from the green close by, and then the whole pandemonium set in.

The cat Civilization, with the ribbon of simulated patriotism round its neck, set upon our country mouse now with feline fury. Every noise that could be made by gunpowder, horns, or bells, as well as yelling boys, crashed upon this poor woman's head till she was all but crazy. How she longed for the sweet quiet of her own home, and longed in vain, for she could not get away! Stern and silent as she seemed to be, she was but a woman, and a real feminine panic ensued.

Amanda had her hands full for the rest of the night. Her panacea of "red lavender" was useless, and this was no case for her favorite salve that cured everything. She fanned Melinda, soothed her as she best knew how, and tried with all her heart to comfort and compose the frightened woman, steadied herself by a shy sense of superiority and courage to which Melinda could not attain. But not until sunrise dispersed the crowd of celebrators, and a sort of silence replaced the clamor, could Melinda close her eyes and snatch a nap before breakfast.

Coffee, steak, and stewed potato she could eat when that breakfast came; and later on, when Amanda said timidly, "Would you like to walk out a ways? 'Tis n't quite so hot, and we can get a good place to see the percession," Melinda did not refuse. She was glad to get out-of-doors, but nothing could induce her to ride in the horse cars; so Amanda guided her about the pretty town, showed her the public buildings, the fine houses of

summer residents, the various churches, and the gay shop-windows, till, worn out, they sat down on one of the hard benches set here and there on the green, to wait for the event of the day.

“Who goes into the pr’cession?” inquired Melinda.

“Oh, fire comp’nies, an’ temperance s’cieties, the perlice, and th’ elect men. Bands, too, — brass bands with insterments.”

Melinda stared her fill at the *mélange* that soon wheeled by.

“Say, Mandy, what be them fellers with muffs on their heads, a-throwin’ up sticks and ketchin’ of ’em?”

“They call ’em drum majors, I b’lieve, though I don’t see no drums. I do lot on seein’ ’em always, they ’re so pompious, and yet so spry. Look! d’ ye see that one catch his batten an’ twirl it?”

Melinda nodded her great bonnet, which had all day attracted nearly as much attention as she bestowed on the drum majors, but she was tired enough to go home now and enjoy a cold dinner.

Perhaps she thought the terrors of the day were over, but they were not. For years before her marriage they had all lived in the deep country, so that the most common sights of the town were unknown to her; and when Amanda insisted on her going out to see the fireworks that wound up that holiday, Melinda’s nerves received another shock. The star-dropping rockets, the spitting pinwheels, the soft roar of Roman candles, the blare of “set”

pieces, neither pleased nor interested her; she was in terror lest those irresponsible fire-flakes should light on her Sunday bonnet, and every fierce rush of a rocket made her jump with fresh fear.

"Don't say no more, Mandy!" she declared the next day, when her sister tried to have her stay longer. "I've *got* to go. I could n't stan' it another minute. I'm real obleeged to ye for what ye've did to make it pleasant for me, but I can't stan' a town. I'm all broke up a'ready, and I'm as homesick as a cat to get back. I'd rather have a hovil out in the lots than a big house here. There's too many other folks here for me. I wish 't you'd come out to Glover and make it home 'long o' me."

"Land, Melindy! I could n't live there an hour. I should die of clear lonesomeness, — I know I should. Why, when I had the neurology in my diagram, last winter, and there come a dretful snow, so as that the neighbors could n't none of 'em happen in, I thought 't would finish me up. What should I do if I was took sick to your house? No doctor, no folks around! It makes me caterpillar to think on't. But I'm jest as obleeged, and I hope you'll come to Munson some time when 't ain't the Fourth."

So Melinda went back to her solitude, and Amanda settled down again to her town life, yet with a vague sense of trouble. She could not have defined it, but it really was the consciousness that, having obtained her heart's desire, it had not

satisfied her. We all come to it sooner or later. "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness," says David. Is not the phrase a tacit confession that nothing on earth had ever satisfied him, king and poet as he was?

A month or two after Melinda went back to Glover, Amanda received a more positive, an appreciable shock in the following letter: —

DEAR MANDY, — I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am usually well and hope you enjoy the same blessing. I have been busy continual sence I come back, finding quite a little to do about the house and gardin.

I supose I had better speak wright out, though you will be some surprised I expect to hear that I am intending for to change my condishun soon. Fact is Deacon Parker and I calculate to be joined in the bans of Matrimony Monday next. 't was quite onexpected to me when he spoke, but after a thinking of it over it looked as though the' was a Providence into it for I called to mind what you said about my being took sick here all alone, and though I am not fur along in years, nor sickly, still the' is sech a thing as accidents to be pervided against at all times. I have heered folks say that they would n't be no man's fourth, but law! what's the difference? The others is all dead, and buried.

We sha'n't make no weddin', but he and me will be pleased to see you when you can make it convenient to come out to Glover for a spell. Mabbe

you would n't be so lonesome now for he keeps quite a few chickens ; he 's a master hand for eggs.

So no more at present from

Yourn truly

MELINDY PERKINS.

" Oh, Lordy ! " shrieked Amanda, as Mrs. Phelps opened the door and she dropped her letter. " Oh ! I never did ! What upon airth is she a-thinkin' of ? Heavens to Betsey ! that miser'ble old stick ! "

" Why, Mandy Hart, what 's befell *you* ? "

" Befell *me* ? 'T ain't me. I ain't nobody's fool. Mis' Phelps, Melindy is a-goin' to marry a old feller out to Glover as white-headed an' red-eyed as a albinia rabbit, and as toothless as a punkin lantern. Pos'tive ! I don't no more see how she can ! Moreover, she sort of twits me with sayin' that I should n't know how to be took sick in her house, 't was so lonesome, and no doctor within five mild, and no way of gettin' to one at that. Says that put it into her head ! "

" Well off, ain't he ? " asked Mrs. Phelps, with the crisp acerbity of a woman who knows her world.

" She says he 's got means and she 'll hev a home. A home, with that little ferret a-hoverin' around the hull endurin' time ! I 'd rather grind a hand-organ round Munson streets ! I did n't think Melindy *could*."

Two irrepressible tears trickled down the grieved old face from eyes that were sadder than the tears.

But Amanda had made her moan. She did not answer Melinda's letter ; she went on her tedious way with more patience but less cheer than ever, and the next thing she heard of her sister was the following spring, when a note from Deacon Parker arrived, running thus : —

MISS AMANDY HART, — This is to inform you that your sister is real sick with a fever ; the doctor thinks she 's dangerous. She 's kep a-askin' for you for a week back, but I did n't pay no attention to 't, thought she was kind of flighty and 't would only be a bill of expense to send for ye. But now Doctor Fenn says she 's got to hev a nuss any way, so I be-thought me to send for you. I expect to pay your way so I put in a five dollar bill. If you 'll come a Wednesday I shall be pleased to see ye.

Yours to command,

AMMI PARKER.

Amanda was alert immediately ; she had short notice to set her house in order and buy a few little delicacies for her sister. A born nurse, she knew just what to get and what to take, and was ready to set off on the early train next day. The journey seemed longer than before, the stage road was heavy, and it was much further to the deacon's house than to her sister's. She found Melinda very ill indeed.

"You poor dear soul !" Amanda said, as she bent over her sister, with her heart in her kind eyes.

“I wish ’t you ’d sent for me before. I wish I had ye down to Munson in the Home Hospittle; you ’d be so much better off.”

A flash of hot color surged up into the sick woman’s sallow, listless face; she lifted herself, with the sudden force of will, higher on her pillow; a weak, hoarse voice issued from her blackened lips.

“I would n’t go! Don’t ye speak on ’t! None o’ them institootions for me. I ain’t so low down as that, — not yet!” It was the last protest of sturdy independence; she sank down again, and began muttering to herself.

Amanda looked about her to see what could be done. The room was small and dark, opening out of the kitchen. The one window faced the north; not a ray of sun ever visited it, and its outlook was on a rough lane leading to the near barnyard. On the other side of the lane was a swamp, where the first grass was just greening the tussocks, and folded cones of skunk cabbage were slowly growing up out of the black stagnant water. The window could not be opened; evidently no one had tried to open it since it was paint-stuck, years ago. She could do nothing there, so she set the door wide into the kitchen and opened the outer door. Fumes of boiling cabbage and frying pork came into the bedroom in clouds, but there was fresh air mingled with them. Melinda lay in the hollow of a feather bed, burning with typhoid fever, and Amanda could not lift her without help; the deacon was

milking, and old Moll Thunder, the temporary "help," was half drunk. Amanda thought with a pang of the clean rooms and easy beds of the Cottage Hospital at Munson, the white-capped nurses, the skillful doctors, and her heart sank, though she knew, from long experience of sickness, that no human power could save Melinda now; but it might have been otherwise, and she was her only sister, the last tie of kindred blood. She did what she could to make the poor woman comfortable, but it was too late. Melinda did not utter a rational word again: a few broken whispers, — "To home," "What a green medder!" "Tell Mandy," — and then stupor overpowered all her faculties. There were a few hours of sonorous breathing; the stern features settled into the pinched masque of death. Melinda had gone beyond her sister's help.

"Yes," said Amanda, the week after, to Mrs. Phelps, who had come in to sympathize with her, "she was dretful sick when I got there; reelly you may say she was struck with death. And now the last one I'd got lies a-buried in the sand an' stuns in that lonesome graveyard, full o' hardhacks and mulleins. 'T wa'n't much of a funeral, but I had 'em sing Jordan, for you know it tells about 'sweet fields beyond the swellin' flood;' and she favored the country so, it seemed sort o' considerate so to do. Oh, dear! she was all the sister I'd got, Mis' Phelps, and 't is a real 'fiction. Deacon

Parker was a mind to have me stay 'long o' him, for company; he was, pos'tive! But mercy! I should ha' gone crazy a-lookin' at him, if I had!"

Now Amanda was alone indeed: she had been so for years, but there had always been an aim and object to her life; Melinda was in her mind and on her heart. The pleasant expectations, the frail hopes, that had been so dear to her tried in vain to live: they had no resting point; they recoiled on her with a dull sense of want and solitude. She grew listless, feeble, and sad; yet when a friend or neighbor came in to see her she brightened up, and was so cheery that it was a surprise to them all when she took to her bed and had a doctor. He could find nothing that seemed to warrant her weakness; ordered nourishment, as doctors do, gave her some harmless pills, and went away smiling.

"He do'no nothin' what ails me," Amanda said in a half whisper to Mrs. Phelps. "I guess I've got through. I've always looked forrard to Melindy's comin' finally to live with me; an' fust she went an' married that old Parker, an' then she up an' died. I wish 't I'd ha' stayed with her longer; mabbe she would n't have died. She was n't old; not nigh so old as I be. I feel as though there was n't nothin' to live for; but I s'pose if 't is the Lord's will I *shall* live, only I guess 't ain't. I feel a goneeness that I never had ketch hold o' me before. Well, I sha'n't be lonesome, anyway; there 's many mansions, and they tell about the

holy city; and all my folks is there — or somewhere.”

A vague look clouded her eyes for an instant, but she was too weak to speculate. Once more she spoke, very softly : —

“ I hope M'lindy likes it. ‘ Sweet fields,’ — that 's what the hymn tells about.”

She turned her head on the pillow, sighed — and was gone.



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